

sojourners

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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Trayvon Martin

Michael Brown

Robbie Tolan

Tamir Rice

Martin Lee Anderson

Alesia Thomas

Leon Ford

Terence Crutcher

Corey Jones

Jannie Ligons

Kendrick Johnson

Marlon Brown

Stephon Clark

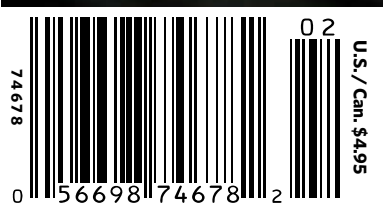
Botham Jean

Emantic Bradford Jr.

The Advocate

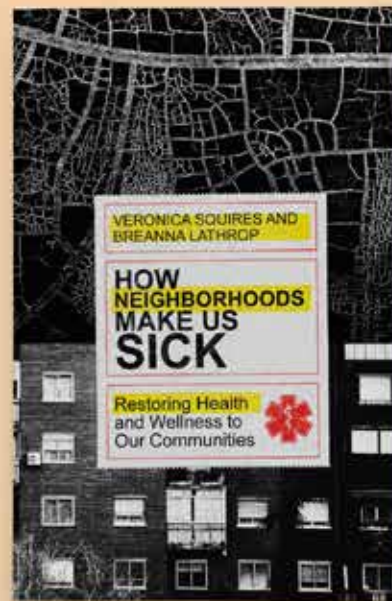
When black families are torn apart by violence, their first call is to Benjamin Crump.

by Da'Shawn Mosley



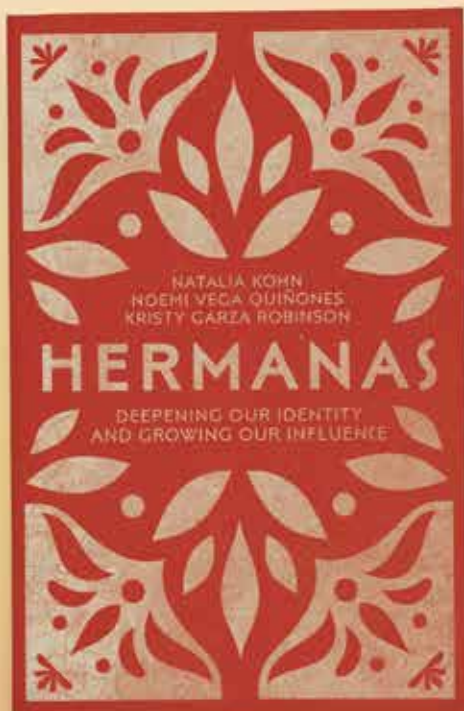


Written by a world-class roster of scholars, this volume challenges us to think more critically and constructively about how white normativity has been parasitically joined to Christianity.



Creating healthier neighborhoods requires a commitment to health equity. These authors have discovered that we can help our communities flourish by addressing social determinants of health in under-resourced neighborhoods.

PURSUING **JUSTICE** IN **DIVERSE** CONTEXTS



..... Sharing their own journeys as Latinas and leaders, these three women find mentorship in twelve inspirational women of the Bible who navigated challenges of brokenness and suffering, being bicultural, and crossing borders.

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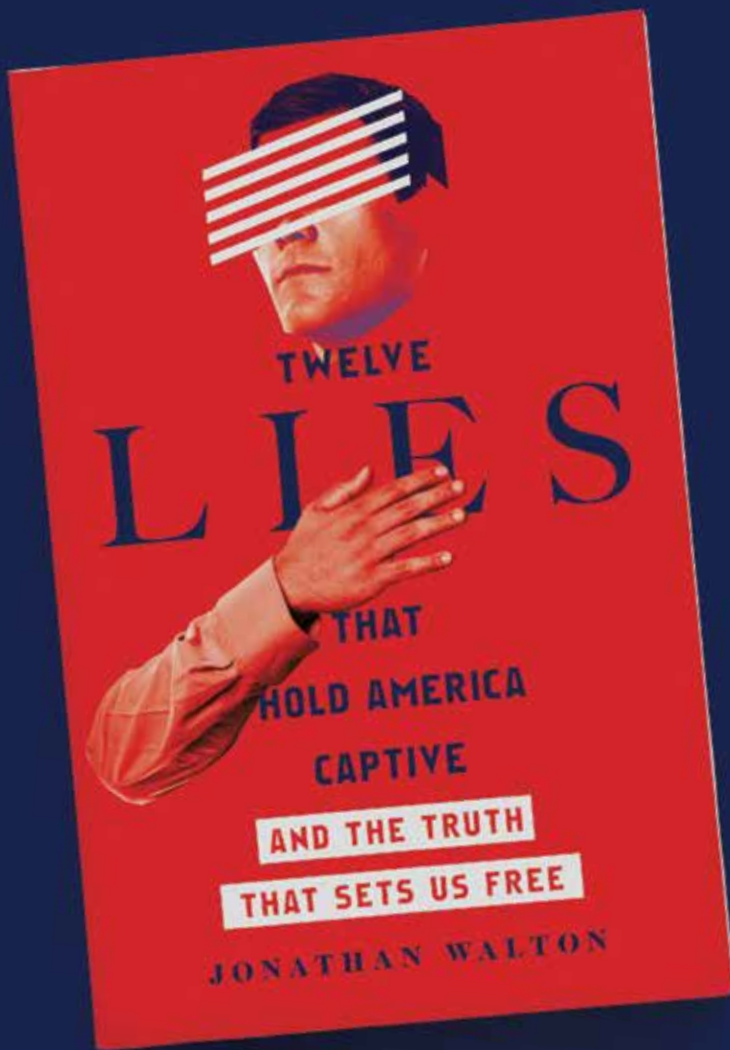
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IS AMERICA BLINDED BY WHITE AMERICAN FOLK RELIGION?

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**The president is not the Messiah,
the Constitution is not the Bible,
and the United States is not a city on
a hill or the hope for the world.**

Learn more at 12LiesBook.com

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In his book **Twelve Lies That Hold America Captive**, Jonathan Walton, longtime director of the New York City Urban Project, exposes cultural myths and misconceptions about America's identity. He shows us how **American ideology has become a false religion** and how our notions of **life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness** are at odds with the call to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

////////////////////////////////////

*"We cannot witness to the kingdom of God and be held captive to lies.
Jonathan offers a compelling vision of what we can become, but
only if we choose to see and reject the lies we've held."*

RICH VILLODAS, lead pastor of New Life Fellowship, New York City

"IT'S HARD TO imagine the average evangelical church embracing Mutesa's colorful portraits of nude black joy," writes Faith-Marie Zamblé in her profile of the young photographer whose work is rippled with laughter, face paint, and bare skin. Though the mood of Mimi Mutesa's work is more exuberant than explicit, Zamblé is right: Blame it on the apple, Augustine, or purity culture, but many churches we know—evangelical or otherwise—blush when it comes to body parts, especially naked ones. Ever notice how crucifixes often have Jesus wearing a loincloth despite scripture's insistence he was stripped?

We suspect Christian jitters around nudity are rooted in fear that naked bodies will arouse unholy sexual thoughts. But as Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber points out, the church's tendency to couple

sexuality and sin has led to a sense of shame that many Christians find hard to shake. "I wonder how we could begin to honor sexual pleasure as something that can connect us more deeply to ourselves and others and God, yet still speak the truth about the ways in which our behaviors around sex can also do the opposite," she writes in "Honor Thy Sexual Pleasure?" an excerpt from her forthcoming book, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*.

In our cover story, Assistant Editor Da'Shawn Mosley talks about faith with Benjamin Crump, the civil rights attorney whose clients include the families of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and most recently Emantic Bradford Jr., a black man



shot from behind by police at an Alabama mall on Thanksgiving Day. Despite his line of work, Crump is hopeful, writes Mosley, and "gives the impression that he cares about my well-being, my whole self, and he has oriented his life toward

holding the American legal system accountable for my safety."

This too is an expression of sensuality, not of the prurient variety, but of deep attentiveness to both body and soul. "To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread," wrote James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*. Body and blood, flesh and soul: This form of sensuality is essential to our holy recovery. ■

Letters

Molech and Herod

A profound thank-you for Rose Marie Berger's powerful column, "No More Cover-Ups," in the December 2018 issue. It is a heroic, necessary, and epiphanic piece: I must have read it a score of times. As a cradle Catholic who never left Holy Mother Church, I wish you would send it to USCCB.org for the bishops to read. I was particularly struck by your bringing in Molech and Herod. Kudos to you for saying Catholics helped elect Herod to the presidency. I am quoting you all over the place: God bless you for such a spirited and enlightened essay.

Philip Kolin

Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Jesus Died for Justice

Ed Spivey Jr.'s "H'rumps" column, "What, This Again?" in the December 2018 issue astounded me so much I had to read it several times to be sure I understood it. I am not a theologian, but I believe that justice is the very reason Christ died, as spelled out in Romans 4:25: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." To claim [as did the authors of the "For the Sake of Christ" statement] that ideals such as living "justly in the world" are not

I am not a theologian, but I believe that justice is the very reason Christ died.

"definitional components of the gospel" is to deny Christ. It is also to deny the words of God as they are found in Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

L.K. Barker

Bristol, Tennessee

An Act of Desperation

I read with interest Danny Duncan Collum's "When Zeal Turns Tragic" in the December 2018 issue of *Sojourners*. I knew Charles Moore. We served as Methodist ministers together in Carthage, Texas, in the late 1950s and '60s. It was a tense time during the civil rights movement, and Carthage was a place of anger. Moore was intelligent, bold, reflective, and determined to see change come about. His life was committed to justice. I do not think the tragedy of his death was about depression, but more about desperation; he just could not get support from his denomination. He wanted me informed of his act, as my name was in that paper under the windshield wiper. That has plagued me ever

since. He had much to offer, and I did not know of his desperation.

Jack Albright
Jacksonville, Texas

Prison Pipeline

The November 2018 issue of *Sojourners* had extraordinarily worthwhile articles. "Who Pays for Prison?" by Julie Bender was especially relevant for me. I was involved in child welfare services all my adult life, including 20 years in the U.S. Children's Bureau. There was a time when those services were child- and family-focused. Yet, today, when children are placed in group care, their case plan often does not include their placement in a family once they are discharged. Most of these kids leave the group alone. I hope Bender will be able to write about this issue and the way it increases the prison population.

Jake Terpstra

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Your name here! Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

A Nation at a Crossroads



SEVEN YEARS AGO this month, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old high school student, was shot and killed while visiting relatives in Sanford, Fla. After George Zimmerman's 2013 acquittal for Trayvon's murder, I wrote about what it meant to me, particularly as a father.

I wrote about the fundamental injustice of a system and a nation in which a teenage boy like Trayvon could be killed as a direct result of being racially profiled, and his killer not held accountable, while my own teenage boys would never need to fear that a stranger would target them due to their race:

If my white 14-year-old son, Luke, had walked out that same night, in that same neighborhood, just to get

parents what they were talking about with their children [that] weekend. It is a long-standing conversation between black dads and moms and their children, especially their boys, about how to carefully behave in the presence of police officers with guns. Now they must add any stranger who might have a gun and could claim they were fearful of a black man and had to shoot. This is one of those painful moments that reveal an utterly segregated society. Most white people, conservatives and liberals, had almost no idea of what was happening in virtually every black family in America.

White Christians cannot and must not leave the sole responsibility of telling the truth about America, how it has failed Trayvon and so many other black Americans, solely to their African-American brothers and sisters in Christ. It's time for white Christians to listen to their black brothers and sisters, to learn their stories, and to speak out for racial justice and reconciliation. The country needs multiracial communities of faith to show us how to live together.

WHAT DOES THE killing of Trayvon Martin and its aftermath tell us about the United States today?

It is undeniable, on the one hand, that a new generation of civil rights activism and activists have emerged in the years since Trayvon's killing, most importantly in the Black Lives Matter movement, which arose as a response to the killing of people of color such as Trayvon and Michael Brown. Police violence against people of color has led to a broad conversation on structural racism, particularly in the criminal justice system, that had not been in mainstream political discourse until Black Lives Matter activists put it there, often at great personal risk and sacrifice.

We have seen the work of the movement translate to real reforms in states and localities across the country as recently as the 2018 midterms. Voters approved ballot initiatives such as Amendment 4 in Florida, which restores the voting rights of former felons who have paid their debt to society, and ended non-unanimous jury convictions in Louisiana. Both measures represented direct reversals of policies that had been instituted for clearly racist purposes. We have also seen district attorneys elected on promises of significant reform in places such as Philadelphia, Denver, Chicago, and elsewhere.

Yet as much as the killing of Trayvon and so many others sparked a movement, the breadth and ferocity of white resistance and backlash to forward motion on racial justice has also revealed itself. Donald Trump's political rise has both harnessed and revealed that "white-lash"; it can best be understood as not the cause but the consequence of our nation's continued racial illness of white supremacy, which claims so many black and brown lives every year, as it has since before our nation's founding.

America still has a choice to make. Will we be a racist nation going forward? Is what we are now experiencing white supremacy's last gasp, its "death knell," as some people have said? Or is it another double-down against racial justice that we should expect to see over and over in the decades to come?

Honoring the life of Trayvon Martin and so many others whose lives and bodies have been destroyed by white supremacy means making a commitment to never stop fighting for the country to make the right choice. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Donald Trump's political rise can best be understood as not the cause but the consequence of white supremacy.

a snack, he would have come back unharmed—and he would still be with me and Joy today. But when black 17-year-old Trayvon Martin went out that night, just to get a snack, he ended up dead—and is no longer with his dad and mom. Try to imagine how that feels, as his parents.

Martin Luther King Jr. said in his "I Have a Dream" speech, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." King's dream failed on Feb. 26, 2012, when George Zimmerman decided to follow Trayvon Martin because of the color of his skin. Racial profiling is a sin in the eyes of God. It should also be a crime in the eyes of our society and in the laws we enact to protect each other and our common good.

White parents should ask black



Shutterstock

By Jenna Barnett

Can 'Locker Room Talk' Be Redeemed?

Four top athletes break down what it means to be a man.

WHEN I WAS a high school soccer and basketball player, locker rooms were a sanctuary for me. I remember elaborate pregame handshakes and earnest debates over whether it was okay to pray for a win. I chatted with teammates about defensive strategy, physics homework, and crushes. But I do not remember anyone ever bragging about sexual assault.

Donald Trump excused as “locker room talk” his vulgar boasting about kissing, groping, and trying to have sex with women during the infamous 2005 conversation caught live by *Access Hollywood* and released during the 2016 campaign. Trump’s lewd remarks still loom large for me, because I refuse to normalize having an admitted sexual assaulter in the Oval Office and also because UltraViolet, a creative women’s advocacy organization, periodically plays that videotape on a continuous loop in front of the U.S.

Capitol. Tourists, members of Congress, and everyone else get a regular reminder of who is in the White House.

However, as UltraViolet’s action and the flood of #MeToo testimonials demonstrate, it is not enough to shine a light on the prevalence of sexual violence. Revelation alone

“Growing up, you figure out quickly how a boy is supposed to act.” — Kevin Love

does not beget liberation. We can’t simply hold up a mirror to our cultural misogyny and expect the image to change. For real transformation, we must project a true image—an *imago dei*—rather than our current distortion.

In November, a project emerged in the sports world to promote positive, healthy masculinity. In four short webisodes, NBA all-star Kevin Love sits down with athletes

Michael Phelps, Paul Pierce, and Channing Frye for vulnerable discussions on mental health and what it means to be a man. “We’re reclaiming locker room talk,” says Love in the trailer.

Love broke the guy code of silence in March in an essay for *The Players’ Tribune* about his mid-game panic attack and subsequent hospitalization. “Growing up, you figure out really quickly how a boy is supposed to act. You learn what it takes to ‘be a man.’ It’s like a playbook: Be strong. Don’t talk about your feelings. ... These values about men and toughness are so ordinary that they’re everywhere ... and invisible at the same time, surrounding us like air or water. They’re a lot like depression or anxiety in that way.”

The web series, called *Locker Room Talk*, is produced in partnership with Schick Hydro and the Movember Foundation as

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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part of Schick Hydro's "The Man I Am" campaign, which pushes men to celebrate their individuality.

In one of Love's interviews, decorated Olympic swimmer Phelps discusses his life-threatening depression. "I don't ever want my medals to define who I am," says Phelps, "because that's not who I am. ... You could be the strongest man in the world, but you're still going to go through problems."

Each guest shares mental health struggles and the need for vulnerability before finishing the episode with a public face-shaving session. Cleverly, Schick brands itself as the clean-shaven face of a rebranded manhood.

Sustained change comes from a clear vision of what we can be at our best, not just from incessant critiques of who we are at our worst. As an athlete, cheers for my

team always motivate me more than boos toward the opposition.

February means Super Bowl season. I struggle with the sport that seems to epitomize (or at least symbolize) the worst parts of a dying masculinity—hiding under masks, proving self-worth by tearing another to the ground. But more and more male athletes are redefining what it means to be a man, Kevin Love included.

What would it look like for high school and community-league sports teams to have similarly intentional conversations about a new vision for masculinity? This Super Bowl season, I want something to cheer for—even after both teams head to the locker room. ■

Jenna Barnett, women and girls campaign coordinator at Sojourners, plays pick-up basketball and indoor soccer in Washington, D.C.

By Samuel Alexander and Brendan Gleeson

How to Reinhabit the Suburbs

Planned economic contraction may provide a way forward in climate collapse.

AT THE VERY hour when modern humanity arrived at the pinnacle of triumph—a global marketplace promising riches for all—the skies have been darkened by the terrible specters of ecological crisis and social disruption. This realization dawns just as the urban age has been declared: More than half of humanity now lives in cities.

Surely these occurrences—the urban age and the overlapping crises of our time—are connected. Indeed, any reconciliation with the Earth will doubtless involve a "great resettlement" of our species, through which we, *homo urbanis*, endeavor to reconcile our urbanity with planetary limits—the epoch of the great suburban dispensation.

Our work defines this challenge by focusing on the suburbs: the sprawling, low-density urban landscape that surrounds large cities, especially in the "new world" of North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Suburbia is typically inhabited by high-impact and aspiring consumers, who are both creatures and creators of the growth economy. Every aspect of the modern suburban existence is dependent on fossil fuels, but what fossil fuels giveth, fossil fuels

threaten to taketh away.

Rather than seeing suburbia as a consumerist wasteland, we see it as having a latent capacity to become something new. Of course, the suburbs will not be knocked down to be built again in a "green" way. Instead, the task is to resettle or reinhabit the suburbs from the grassroots up, according to a new vision of progress.

The new vision we propose is that of "degrowth," which refers to a bold process of *planned contraction* of overgrown economies. Given that the global economy is in gross ecological overshoot while billions still live in destitution, it follows that justice and sustainability require degrowth in the richest nations. This may not seem likely—and it isn't—but we argue degrowth is the most coherent paradigm for resolving the crises of our times.

Fortunately, when approached creatively, the low-density suburban landscape shows itself to be a more promising place to start a transformative retrofit than the high-density urban areas. While governments do little or nothing to respond positively to social and environmental issues, suburbanites could be growing food, turning their houses into

From the Archives

February 1986

A Call to Our Hearts

IMAGINE the refugee woman as the figure who replaces the hero in our consciousness. She is the archetype of our vulnerability fleshed out in the hostage, the homeless, the poor, the prisoner, the victim of human-made and natural disasters. Her image calls us to acknowledge that we are all vulnerable. No one is secure. It tells us that the more we cling to our securities, the more we become playthings of illusion. ...

At the one pole, we are, most of us, citizens of a country with imperial claims and policies and weapons. We are enticed into absolutizing the state. Our nation state has created weapons (idols) that its people, in the name of loyalty and patriotism, are told to trust in (worship)—trust in the security they offer us and our way of life. ...

The other pole calls to our hearts, to our shared humanity, to our dependency on and interdependency with the earth, air, water, fire. It speaks in whispers to what is best in us, not as citizens of one country over against all that threatens us, but as people who are part of one world. At times accusingly, at times with gentle coaxing, this pole speaks of the image of the refugee woman and all that she stands for, calling us to go where it hurts, to enter those places where pain is part of life, to share her brokenness and anguish and fear. To become vulnerable. ■

Elizabeth McAlister, 79, was serving a three-year sentence for a nonviolent action when this article appeared. She has been in pretrial custody in Georgia since April 4, 2018, for a protest at the Kings Bay nuclear submarine base.



places of local production, sharing their resources with neighbors, and developing the skills and values of self-sufficiency and frugality.

Eventually we will need governments to get on board, but our theory of change is that there will never be radical state action for a degrowth society until there is a culture of sufficiency that demands it.

Today we see a diverse range of movements working toward a new urbanity. These include local food initiatives—from local farmers markets and community gardens—and larger urban agriculture projects. It includes the participants and organizers of emerging sharing economies, as well as the growing pool of climate activists, divestment organizers, permaculture groups, transition towns, and progressive labor unions. In Australia, there is the small but vocal “save our suburbs” network, in which we see the seeds of more progressive and resilient city planning. And it includes the energy-frugal households

quietly moving toward solar, one by one undermining the fossil fuel industry, as well as the artists, musicians, storytellers, and filmmakers that are redefining and telling new stories of prosperity.

Theologian Paul Tillich called suburban Christianity “one of the greatest dangers for Protestantism.” What would it take to turn that danger into an opportunity to creatively build new communities for climate resilience? We hold up urban social movements as a key driver for suburban renewal. We hope faith-based communities in the suburbs engage with degrowth practices and make them their own—and create a new, more humane and compassionate world within the shell of the old. ■

Samuel Alexander is a research fellow and Brendan Gleeson is director of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia. They are co-authors of Degrowth in the Suburbs: A Radical Urban Imaginary.

By Adam R. Taylor

The Good News on Global Poverty

More than a billion people have lifted themselves out of extreme destitution.

THE WORLD RECEIVED some very good news in September. The percentage of the global population living in extreme poverty has dropped from 36 percent in 1990 to 10 percent in 2015, the lowest in recorded history. Over this period more than 1 billion people lifted themselves out of the quicksand of extreme poverty.

The Millennium Development Goals, agreed to through the United Nations in 2000, helped galvanize global leadership to cut extreme poverty in half in 15 years, a goal that was achieved a few years early due to remarkable progress in China and India. About half of the world's countries have reduced extreme poverty below 3 percent.

In 2016, the MDGs were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs represent a more integrated and comprehensive global agenda centered around 17 goals and 169 targets that now apply to every country in the world, not only to developing countries. They combine a commitment to end extreme poverty

by the year 2030—especially in countries across sub-Saharan Africa and fragile conflict-affected states where progress has been uneven—with commitments to protect the environment, address climate change, combat inequality, promote peace, and improve governance.

The new goals are rooted in the principle of “dignity for all” and the sacred obligation to “leave no one behind,” which echoes Christ's option for the poor and the biblical mandate to care for and prioritize the welfare of the widow, orphan, stranger, and people living in poverty.

Faith-based organizations, including World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Caritas Internationalis, American Jewish World Service, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance, played a crucial role in ensuring that the SDGs were holistic and bold. The contributions and advocacy of faith-inspired groups is essential for generating the political will necessary to ensure the goals don't

join the graveyard of broken promises from wealthy nations to the world's most impoverished.

Religious representatives wield incredible influence on the opinions and priorities of their adherents. This influence can be an asset in changing social norms and behavior and in building social movements. For example, since 2009 the Nigerian Interfaith Action Association has trained and mobilized more than 25,000 Christian and Muslim leaders to raise awareness about malaria and convince people to use bed nets. While previous government-funded efforts had largely failed, the religious leaders were essential in changing behavior and turning the tide in Nigeria's battle against a common and often fatal enemy: the mosquito.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an extensive network of Catholic clinics and hospitals provides 40 percent of all health services in the country. Through the work of Caritas, the Catholic Church has played a leading role not only in delivering essential services but in promoting peace in some of the most impoverished and conflict-affected countries in the world.

Sadly, foreign aid and a commitment to the SDGs is under assault across the world, including by the U.S. The goals can't be achieved under storm clouds of protectionism, nativism, and isolationism. A world of dignity for all is undermined by doctrines of nationalism and provincialism, including the misguided America First doctrine of the Trump administration. Dignity for all is out of reach when aid budgets are under threat, climate change accelerates, violent conflicts remain intractable, and corruption continues.

Since the SDGs are not politically binding, they will only succeed if they are undergirded by a tidal wave of public awareness and pressure to hold governments accountable to promises made. The true catalyst will be the degree to which religious organizations capture people's moral imagination and galvanize moral pressure to ensure that governments and the private sector internalize and act on this bold agenda. ■

Adam R. Taylor is executive director of Sojourners. He previously led the Faith Initiative at the World Bank Group.

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NEWS



Elsy Torreglosa bundles recycled wood onto a trash pile. With small tasks like this, Torreglosa has become a caretaker of her neighborhood in Medellin, Colombia.

Megan Janetsky/sojourners

Transforming What's Discarded

When guerilla forces invaded Elsy Torreglosa Gallego's small Colombian town in 1986, she and her four kids fled to the large city of Medellin. With nowhere else to go, they—along with thousands of other displaced Colombians—built houses out of garbage in Moravia, a swampy part of the city used as a dump. But today, Moravia is different. "It's a neighborhood I love with all of my heart, one that I have fought to transform," Torreglosa told Sojourners. Read how local organizers continue to make Moravia a better place for all its residents at sojo.net/moravia.

VIEWS



Shutterstock

Not Worth Including?

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required public spaces to accommodate disabled people by providing ramps, designated parking, and wheel chair lifts. Yet Christian churches and schools lobbied against the bill, claiming the cost of these features would represent government intrusion into religious affairs. "Nothing has been shown to indicate that there is a national necessity to apply the ADA Bill to churches, religious schools, and other ministries," wrote Association of Christian Schools International representative William Bentley Ball in a 1989 letter. Today religious buildings remain exempt from ADA requirements.

"The outcome of exempting Christian churches and schools from the ADA has been threefold," explains Shannon Dingle. "First, most Christian education programs have only served abled students. Second, no other religions made similar arguments to Ball, so Christians stood alone against access for disabled people. Finally, this outcome communicated to the disability community that they did not belong in mainstream U.S. Christianity, as churches either actively opposed the ADA or passively didn't abide by it because they weren't required to do so legally."

"Disabled people didn't leave the church," said Dingle. "The church didn't even leave us. No, we were never welcome."

Read more at sojo.net/dingle.

QUOTED

“I think I'm retired. I'm trying to behave a little more retired.”

— **Sister Kathleen Schultz, IHM**
on continuing activism in her 70s
sojo.net/schultz



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Maypixel

The Church's Identity Crisis

I SPENT MOST of my childhood in a Methodist church, but I didn't learn the liturgy. It was sung in Korean, and as soon as I started kindergarten, I exchanged fluency in my original language for assimilation. My parents did their best to teach my sister and me as much about our language and customs as they could, but they had to teach us in between their own assimilation for survival. It wasn't until years later, when I was on a campus ministry team that sang from hymnals and overhead projec-

eventual white savior in order to assimilate into a Western culture that glorifies winning, beating all odds, and rising as the unexpected hero. How can this country simultaneously be a Christian nation *and* persecute Christians? Neither is accurate, but both claims are invoked in modern politics and the rhetoric of white evangelicalism—where white evangelicals assimilate into a blind patriotism that ignores history and orthodoxy.

This comes to mind as I consider my dislike for the commercialization of Christmas (more emphasis on Advent and less on gifts, please), Easter (Can we cut out the church-sponsored egg hunts, unless someone can provide statistics on how they increase new membership or facilitate intentional spiritual conversations?), and St. Valentine's Day, a Christian feast day that in today's watered-down, nondenominational yet distinctly evangelical church has become another excuse to glorify romantic love.

Why is that? Why do we U.S. Christians—not just white evangelicals—allow the church to assimilate into a culture that glorifies a temporary romantic love

rather than an enduring one that sacrifices to the point of death? Why are some pastors reluctant to preach against implicit bias (Jesus gives us great examples to work with) but fine with upholding marriage as the earthly ideal? (I'm sure the apostle Paul had some thoughts on this.)

My working theory is that the church has done what it thought it needed to do to survive without stopping to consider the cost of assimilation. And in its fear of failure, it refuses to acknowledge its past mistakes.

Among the gifts my parents have given me over the years are apologies, moments when they acknowledged their failed attempts at something and provided a hopeful way forward. Their apologies aren't frequent, but they are meaningful, marking shifts in our relationship and understanding of each other. Perhaps the white evangelical church could learn a thing or two from the example of two Korean immigrants. ■



*Kathy Khang is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago and author of *Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up*.*

The church is paying a price for its assimilation.

tors, that I connected the Korean words of my church upbringing with a Korean-American faith.

As I've begun working through the personal cost of assimilation, I've looked at the price the church is paying for its own assimilation. At the sound of that, you may think that the rest of this column focuses on legalized abortion, same-sex marriage, and maybe even immigration and border security. Well, it does and it doesn't.

I wonder if white evangelicalism has thought of itself as the underdog, the persecuted, and the

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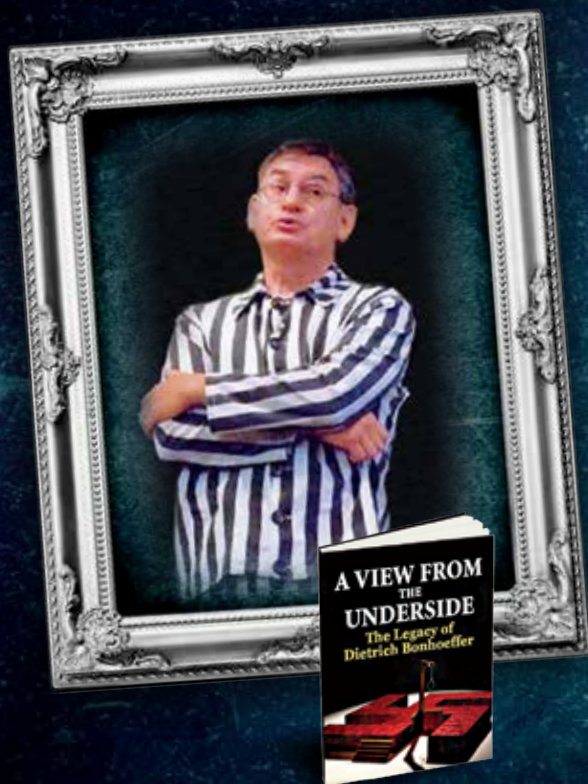
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A View from the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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~ Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's biographer

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~ Bill Moyers

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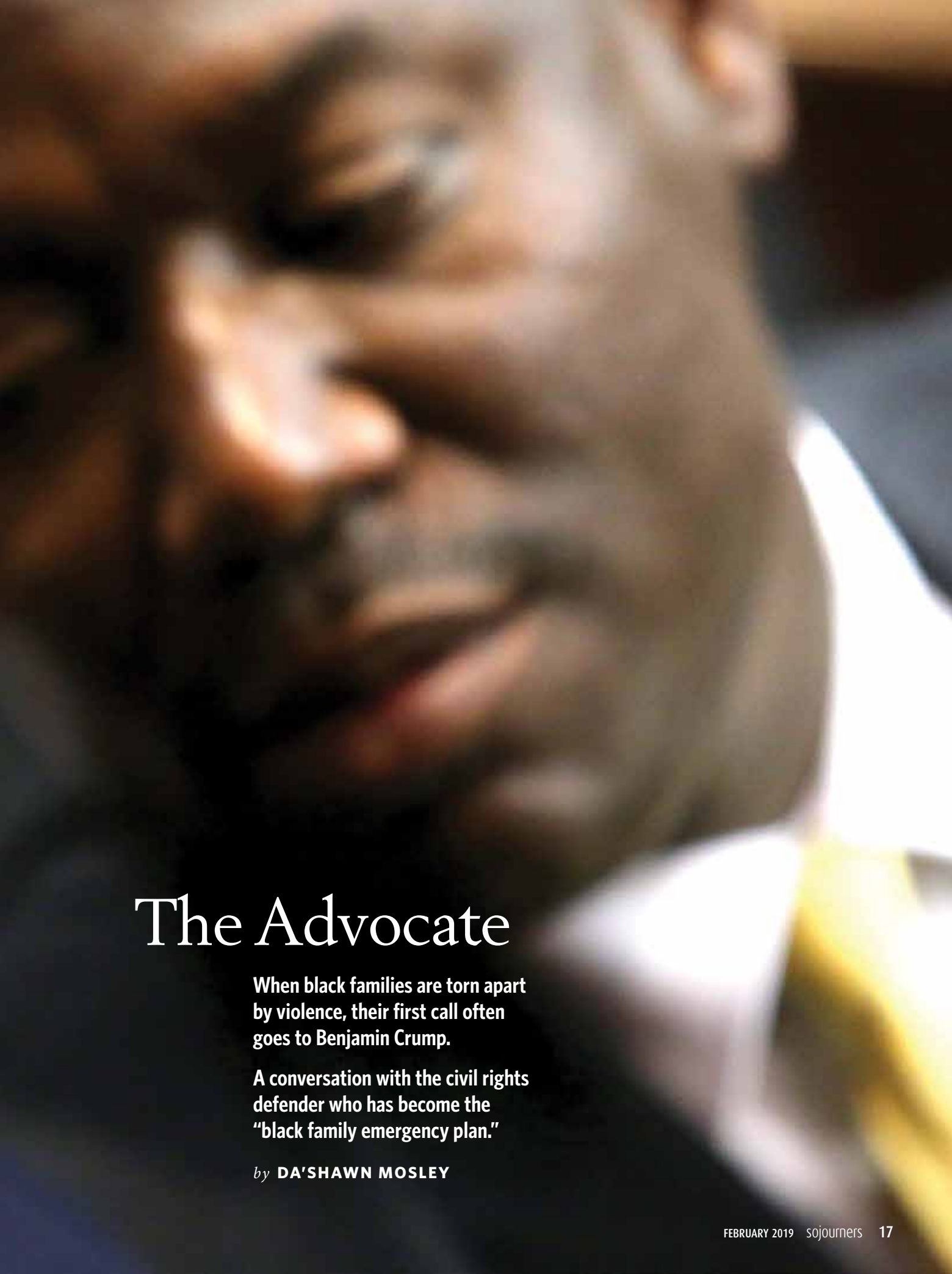
~ Walter Brueggemann

CONTACT: Al Staggs :: al@alstaggs.com
www.peacewithjustice.com



Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, sits with her attorney, Benjamin Crump, in 2013.

Joe Burbank/Reuters



The Advocate

When black families are torn apart by violence, their first call often goes to Benjamin Crump.

A conversation with the civil rights defender who has become the “black family emergency plan.”

by **DA'SHAWN MOSLEY**



"You kill a dog, you go to jail. You kill a little black boy, and nothing happens."

—Benjamin Crump

I F I WERE MURDERED TODAY—say, shot and killed while walking unarmed through a residential area, wearing my hoodie—and my murderer weren't arrested by dawn, my family would make one phone call. To Benjamin Crump.

This has become the African-American family emergency plan—set in motion when the "hurricane" is a white person with a gun. Call Benjamin Crump.

This is what Trayvon Martin's family did in 2012 when they realized the criminal justice system would not punish the man who killed Trayvon. They called the lawyer who once stood on the steps of a courthouse where two white men had just been acquitted of beating to death a 14-year-old boy and said: "You kill a dog, you go to jail. You kill a little black boy, and nothing happens." They called the attorney who, time and time again, tries to make something happen. They called Benjamin Crump.

In Trayvon's case, Crump, one of the best-known civil rights attorneys practicing today, thought at first that something would happen without his help—since the only thing Martin had in his possession when George Zimmerman shot and killed him was a can of fruit juice and a bag of Skittles. When Crump realized there was a strong possibility that justice would not be served, he came face-to-face with what he calls "a test from God."

"Nobody was watching this call between me and this brokenhearted father, save God," Crump told *Sojourners* in a phone interview in October. "And I believe God was testing me to see if I was going to answer the bell, use the blessings and education and all the other things [God] has given me to be a blessing to the least of these. I stepped out on faith to do the right thing. And God took over from there."

Michael B. Thomas/AFP

Above, Benjamin Crump comments on the preliminary autopsy report of Michael Brown, slain in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014. At right, Sequita Thompson stands with Crump as she talks about the fatal police shooting of her grandson Stephon Clark in Sacramento, Calif., in 2018.

'We help David fight Goliath and win'

It wasn't a surprise to learn that Crump is a believer. For years, he has seemed to possess strength that could only come from above. How else could he be so stoic during televised press conferences for his clients, men and women weeping and grieving for their sons and daughters? Crump has stood alongside Tracy Martin, Sybrina Fulton, and many other parents of slain black people, and in their moments of sadness he has found a way to be an unwavering stone of support for them.

Faith is more than a thread through Crump's life: It is his life's scaffolding. Crump grew up in the Pentecostal church and said that, throughout his life, his grandmother "held onto the unchanging Word of God." To this day, Crump considers her the wisest person he has ever met, and the effect her faith had on him and his own belief is evident. The motto of Parks and Crump, the law firm he and his friend Daryl Parks founded and amicably ended more than 20 years later, was: "We help David fight Goliath and win."

Crump often uses biblical parables in his closing arguments, and he attends Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Fla., where he serves on the board of trustees. He is also a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, whose first president was Martin Luther King Jr.

"I constantly recite the psalms," said Crump. "Doing civil rights work, my colleagues and I go into daunting and dangerous situations and receive death threats. But I constantly go back to the Bible and focus on the fact that 'Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I should fear no evil, for thou art with me.'"

In the courtroom, he says, he thinks not only about those he represents but also about the well-being of his adversaries, including the people accused of doing bodily harm to the loved ones of his clients. He says he's just trying to live out the words of 1 Peter 4:8: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

"You have to have no ill will in your heart against your opponent," said Crump. "In fact, you have to pray for them as well. I go into the courtroom reciting scripture

and believing it with my heart. It has allowed me to be successful and allowed God's will to be done."

A passion for the future

Throughout Crump's career, he has had many legal victories, including the conviction of former Oklahoma City police officer Daniel Holtzclaw, who was sentenced to 263 years in prison for 18 counts of sexual assault against eight different women. But Crump has also had many losses, among them the acquittal of Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Trayvon Martin almost seven years ago.

In such grand situations of failure and injustice, how does faith remain strong? Doesn't the belief that good will prevail crack under that pressure?

"I grew up in the government housing projects," he said, "in a very small, conserva-

Much about African-American life has changed since then, Crump says, and yet much remains the same.

"I pray that God will continue to help us produce strong children," said Crump, "who will be able to overcome whatever may come and challenge all this racism and oppression that tries to treat certain children of God as inferior and not deserving of equal justice and equal opportunity to the American dream." A father of one, and parental guardian to two cousins he adopted, Crump cares a great deal about the future of children in this country, and his passion to shape the nation for their betterment fuels his work.

What God expects Christians to do

Since the aftermath of Martin's death, when Crump met with Gov. Rick Scott of Florida to argue why Zimmerman deserved to



tive town: Lumberton, N.C. I saw pain and suffering from an early age. I knew that was part of life, that it's not always going to be easy. But with God's help, we can overcome many situations." He says that while times are tough today for African Americans, he remembers when things were worse. He was born in 1969, only a year after King was shot. At the time of his birth, the nation was still struggling to shape itself in accord with the Civil Rights Act of 1964; many if not most schools were still segregated.

be convicted of murder, Crump has been involved in the intersection of social justice and high-level politics. That involvement has escalated in recent years. Since Trump was inaugurated, Crump has become a powerful critic of the self-proclaimed nationalist, writing searing op-eds for HuffPost and elsewhere about the president's racist and xenophobic statements and policies.

"Today, I can declare without pause that President Donald Trump has now firmly established himself as the most racist

Attorney Benjamin Crump discusses the results of a forensic examination on Emantic Bradford Jr., who was fatally shot by police in Birmingham, Ala., on Thanksgiving Day in 2018. Crump represents Bradford's family.

president this great nation has ever seen,” Crump wrote after Trump told the press that “very fine people” could be found among the white nationalists of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017, which resulted in the death of Heather Heyer and injury to dozens of others.

When Crump is asked what he would say to Christians who continue to support Trump, despite the president’s hateful rhetoric and actions, Crump alludes to King’s statement in the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” And then he talks about the death of Botham Jean, whose family is among Crump’s list of clients.

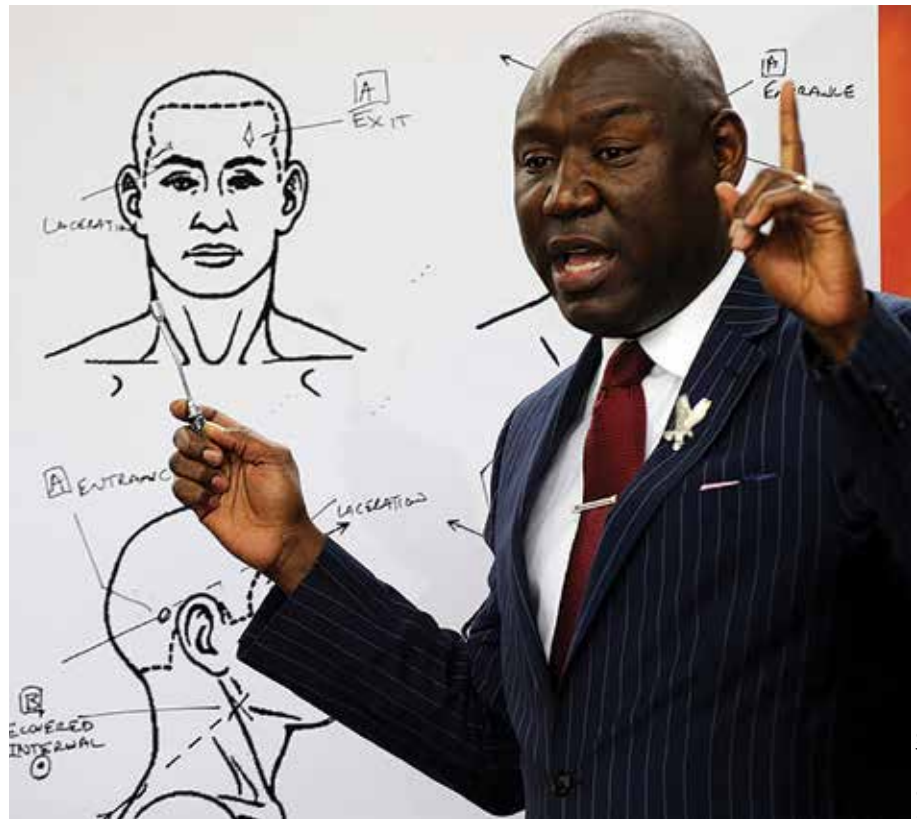
On the night of Sept. 6, 2018, Dallas police officer Amber Guyger, a white woman, arrived at the apartment door of her neighbor, Botham Jean, a 26-year-old African-American man. Guyger entered Jean’s apartment—alleging that she thought she was at her own door and claiming that she thought he was a thief in her home—and she shot and killed him. Since then, many questions have been raised about her story; in late November, a grand jury indicted her for murder, only the second Dallas police officer charged with murder, according to the *Dallas Morning News*, in the last 45 years.

“Botham Jean was an outstanding young man,” said Crump. “College educated, never committed a crime in his life, finished at the top of his class, was a certified public accountant working for PricewaterhouseCoopers, was a devout Christian, went to church on a regular basis, and sang in the gospel choir. ‘Botham Jean’ should be on our tongues when we talk about justice and what God expects us Christians to do.”

The black life insurance policy

Crump believes the same can be said for victims of LGBTQ hate crimes. That’s why, even though he works closely with many black Protestants—more than 40 percent of whom oppose same-sex marriage—he has joined the board of the National Black Justice Coalition, an organization that aims to empower the African-American LGBTQ population.

“Discrimination is wrong on any level,” said Crump. “God put us all on this Earth and wants us to try to find [God’s] grace and purpose in our relationship with



[God]. We cannot condemn our brothers and sisters. Whatever institutional justice we have needs to be fair on every level.”

To be a black person in this country and talk to Crump seems a bit like talking to one’s life insurance policy. Yet, somehow, chatting with him makes me feel deeply hopeful. He gives the impression that he cares about my well-being, my whole self, and he has oriented his life toward holding the American legal system accountable for my safety—even though we’ve never met. It’s a divinely inspired act to extend love to someone you don’t know and defend them as fiercely as you would defend yourself.

“Even though those white jurors in that Oklahoma courtroom probably didn’t have any of the life experiences that those poor black women had,” said Crump about the trial of Holtzclaw, “they had a sense of fairness and ethics, humanity and justice. They returned with a verdict to say that we, as a society, are better than this.”

Crump is convinced that such results help victims have faith that the justice system can be made to work for them.

“That was a case that really made me believe that God will move mountains. I tell everybody, including the young lawyers who I’ve tried to inspire: ‘You just fight to do the right thing. God will take over from there.’” ■

Da’Shawn Mosley is assistant editor of Sojourners magazine.

“You just fight to do the right thing. God will take over from there.”



ChameleonEye

Gems

When in “critical situations,”
like the decay of decency in a nation,
or having been exiled to a land where
people demanded anarchy and got it,
there is a tendency to take with us
a portion of the dignity and respect
we had before our nice world ended.

But to take it in an ostentatious form
(one thinks of sedan chairs borne aloft,
of an afternoon spent writing letters at
an ivory-inlaid desk with a gold-nibbed pen),
to bring such ostentation to destitute eyes
would beget Envy, and after Envy
her brats, Thievery and Spilled Blood.

Hence the ruby, or sapphire, or diamond
tucked into a self-inflicted wound some
weeks before departure, to allow healing.
To be sure, scars will remain, but everyone
will have scars. With a precious few,
it is a rare pearl in the painful incision,
vanished when looked for—absorbed.

*John J. Brugaletta lives in McKinleyville,
Calif. His most recent poetry collection is
The Invisible God.*

**Consent and mutuality are essential,
but a Christian ethic of sex requires more.**

by **NADIA BOLZ-WEBER**

Honor Thy Sexual Pleasure?

EVERY WEDNESDAY night, Sam's youth group met in a darkened gymnasium dressed up as a rock concert: decorative fabrics, professional sound equipment, and a light show. A thin, attractive youth pastor with a soul patch and skinny jeans would deliver a message about the evils of sex, drugs, and alcohol.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This was a favorite verse of Sam's youth pastors, who wielded it to warn kids against even *thinking* about sex. If lusting after a woman was just as bad as committing adultery, their logic held, then even thinking about sex is a sin.

Illustrations by Heidi Younger



For sexual flourishing to occur, we must be guided by more than

“The weird thing,” Sam told me, “was that it wasn’t date rape or sexual harassment or even treating people disrespectfully that they were worried about. It was ‘impure thoughts’ and lust.”

There are two problems that I see here: One, these were teenagers, whose bodies are designed by God to become sexual, and two, the Greek word for lust, *epithymia*, is about general desire, not thinking sexual thoughts. If *epithymia* was a term for sexual desire, it would make some other things Jesus said super weird. (For example, Luke 22:15: “And he said to them, I have had *sexual thoughts* about eating this Passover with you before I suffer.”)

More than willing bodies

In Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*, he teaches that the Ten Commandments are about more than the mere absence of bad behavior. They’re also about the presence of good. For instance, you would think that fulfilling the fifth commandment, *Thou shall not murder*, would be a freebie—like the middle square of the bingo card, one we can all just cross off right away. But Luther teaches that fulfilling the fifth commandment requires more than just not killing people. Luther teaches that *Thou shall not murder* means that “we are to love and fear God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life’s needs.” Do no harm *and* support others in all their needs.

Likewise, where sex is concerned, for sexual flourishing to occur we must be guided by more than just the absence of “no” and the absence of harm. That’s why I believe we must also bring *concern* to our consent and mutuality. Concern moves us closer to the heart of Jesus’ own ethic: Love God and our neighbor as ourselves. It requires us to act on another’s behalf. It reframes the choice entirely outside of our own self-interest in a way that consent and mutuality alone do not.

Concern means taking notice of how our sexual behavior affects ourselves and each other. I may be having a mutually pleasurable, consensual relationship with someone, but if I am cheating on my spouse at the time, I have failed to show concern for the person I am married to. If I am in a crisis and totally distraught, I may be more likely to consent to sex when in fact it is

the last thing I need. If someone intuitively this and sleeps with me anyway, they have consent, but they are not showing care and concern. A sexual ethic that includes concern means seeing someone as a whole person and not just a willing body.

Like Sam, I was taught as a child that the Ten Commandments—and, really, all the rules in the Bible, plus several the church just kind of made up—were there because God loves us and wants us to be happy. But in Lutheran seminary I learned that the Ten Commandments are actually about the fact that God loves *our neighbors* and wants to protect them from us. When Luther took away the *Thou shall not murder* free space in the middle of our moral bingo card, he was taking his cue from Jesus. In this text from Matthew, Jesus is saying that *Thou shall not commit adultery* is not simply a matter of not screwing someone other than your spouse. He’s saying, once again, “Love your neighbor. People aren’t objects. Let’s not cause each other harm.”

Nevertheless, Sam would sit in the gymnasium-turned-low-budget-pop-concert, listening to warnings against sexual thoughts and indulging in fantasy. Pornography, in particular, was condemned via a “God knows what websites you visit in the dark” type of admonishment.

“There was always a hint of ‘If you continue a pattern of sin [in which you look at pornography], you’re not a real Christian,’” he explained to me. “All of these messages worked together to convince me that my faith wasn’t real because I ‘struggled’ with sexual desire.”

A loss of pleasure

But I’m here to tell you: Unless your sexual desires are for minors or animals, or your sexual choices are hurting you or those you love, those desires are not something that you need to “struggle with.” They are something to listen to, make decisions about, explore, perhaps have caution about. But struggle with? Fight against? Make enemies of? No.

Sam shut a part of himself down in order to please God. He disconnected from his body and his desires, and it backfired. Eventually Sam found it difficult to connect with even his own feelings, express them, and be heard by those closest to him. In the absence of these vital, intimate connections, he turned to porn to numb the pain.

Sam now considers himself a porn addict.

In my pastoral work I’ve started to suspect that the more someone was exposed to religious messages about controlling their desires, avoiding sexual thoughts, and not lusting in their hearts, the less likely they are to be integrated physically, emotionally, sexually, and

'no' just the absence of and the absence of harm.

spiritually. I've also noticed that the less integrated physically, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually someone is, the more pornography they tend to consume. This is anecdotal evidence and not a scientific study. Nonetheless, I'd like to congratulate conservative Christians on their success in bolstering an industry that they claim to despise.

There is nothing wrong with the fact that our bodies are created to experience pleasure. There is nothing wrong with the fact that our bodies are stimulated by sexual stories and images. It's an empathic response. And just as humans have eaten sweets since the dawn of time, so too have human beings created erotic images as soon as we figured out how to scratch them on the insides of caves.

But what was different a generation ago was that we didn't have access to things like Slurpees and Pornhub. Both the sweets and the sex available to us 24/7 today are exponentially more condensed in form and more convenient to access than anything our ancestors could have imagined. And I wonder if the cost of this, among other things, is a *loss* of pleasure, not an abundance of it. Can we enjoy the pleasure of our middle-aged spouse's body after consuming two straight hours of internet porn featuring impossibly perfect, hairless, willing, youthful actors? How do we appreciate the sweetness of an apple after consuming 32 ounces of Mountain Dew?

these things is morally neutral. Every last one of those activities can cause harm if overdone. And every last one can also bring joy. Too much sleep and your life falls apart; too little and you cannot function. Too much washing and you end up with OCD and raw skin; too little and you smell. Too much praying and you forget to actually take action; too little and you forget that there is a power greater than yourself. Too much making love and you could get sore (and also the dishes never get done, and there isn't time to long for sex again); too little and ... what?

So, how do human beings with our dual natures (being simultaneously sinner and saint) navigate a world full of pleasure when we so easily fall off either end of the abstinence-indulgence continuum? Well, perhaps we should consider what our theology of pleasure is. Because, friend, I do not believe God is monitoring your ability to steer clear of life's pleasures. Viewing sexually explicit images doesn't have to be harmful, just like eating cake doesn't have to be harmful. But there *is* potential harm in both, and the harm varies according to who we are individually: our wiring, our histories, our relationships.

Some of us can eat a piece of chocolate cake once a month, enjoy the pleasure of it, and then immediately return to our balanced diet. But if you find that when you eat chocolate cake a switch gets flipped and suddenly you have no taste for anything else, to the extent that you only desire cake, cake might not be for you. Still, I will not sit here and say that no one should ever eat cake and that it destroys people's lives, just like I would never say that people should

Have your cake ...

'God is a hedonist at heart,' complains one devil to another in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. "He has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least—sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it's any use to us."

Here's what I know about this list: Every last one of



not drink because alcohol destroyed mine. Or that no one should ever view erotic imagery because someone else has developed destructive behaviors around it.

Problems can absolutely arise from the consumption of pornography, including sexual partners' feelings of betrayal and compulsive behaviors that inhibit healthy sexual activity. (Not to mention that there are serious issues of consent, dignity, and justice in the porn industry.) Some people can watch porn and still have a very real and intimate connection with their partner; for them, watching it together doesn't diminish or disrespect their relationship. I have heard this story in my parish. Others have to steer clear entirely. For them, just a few moments of porn and they cannot stop no matter all the reasons they can conjure to control themselves, and their compulsion causes insecurity in their partner and intimacy problems in their relationship. I have also heard *this* story in my parish.

Complicated gifts

I have no answers here. But what I will not do is pick the low-hanging fruit of moral outrage about porn that comes from both liberals and conservatives.

Not while the consumption of pornography is so ubiquitous. I suspect a Venn diagram of those who express disgust about porn (either for reasons of justice or for reasons of sexual morality) and those who secretly watch porn would show a significant overlap. Expressing one thing and doing another is a fearful, lonely place to be, and as a pastor I have no interest in adding to the shame so many people already have about porn, especially those who feel that they should "know better." I believe we can apply an ethic of concern here by acknowledging the potential harm without shaming the behavior entirely.

The point is, it all calls for *attention*. Does something enhance my life and relationships, or does it take it over? Is my behavior compulsive? When I or my partner experience this pleasure, is it bringing me or my partner more deeply into the moment, into the sacred, into our bodies, or is it separating one or both of us from these things?

I believe that our ability to experience pleasure in general, sexual and culinary specifically, is a gift from God, but I am also aware of how tricky these gifts are, and how easily twisted they can be, as Screwtape would say—twisted into dangerous things we avoid (thus eating benzocaine-containing "diet candy" and trying to not even *think* sexual thoughts) or into pain-numbing things we gratuitously gorge upon (thus shame-eating an entire cheesecake or streaming *Edward Penishands*).

As a pastor, I find myself concerned for the self-hatred my parishioners who've struggled with porn describe, and I wonder how we could begin to honor sexual pleasure as something that can connect us more deeply to ourselves and others and God, yet still speak the truth about the ways in which our behaviors around sex can also do the opposite. Perhaps we could start by remembering what St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians: that all things are lawful but not all things are beneficial.

To begin with, I think the church could be a place that bravely encourages a healthy exploration into what the erotic actually is, at its best. The erotic can be that which opens us, peeling away our protective layer. Like citrus, there's a juicy, delicious part of us which if always exposed may wither. That's what the erotic accesses in us. The peel is there for a reason. There's nothing wrong with it. I cannot move through the world without protecting the parts of me that are the sweetest and most vulnerable.

But the erotic can be the way in which the smell of a lover's neck exposes something in us, like a thumbnail making the first opening into the skin of a tangerine. The vascular and the venial become one, and our breath itself changes. The erotic exposes complex layers of surface area: psyche, heart, body, desire, beauty. It is worthy of our attention and our concern. ■

Nadia Bolz-Weber is founder and former



pastor of a Lutheran congregation in Denver, House for All Sinners and Saints. Adapted from Shameless: A Sexual Reformation copyright 2019 (Convergent Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC).

There is nothing wrong with the fact that our bodies are created to experience pleasure.



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

By Every Means Necessary

MY FIRST JOB out of college was teaching at-risk black and Puerto Rican kids in an alternative high school setting. At 20 years old, fresh from a critical theory-oriented undergraduate curriculum, I basically taught what I had read in college: bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Paulo Freire, Noam Chomsky. I

People closest to a tough situation mostly want to find the way out.

was thrilled to do it. After all, in front of me were the people that I had studied in those critical-theory classes—"the oppressed." And here I was to deliver liberation.

"Is this going to get me my GED?" a skeptical student named Angel asked me at one point. "If I pass, I get \$1 an hour more at Cub Foods, and my girlfriend is pregnant, so, you know, I gotta get that. I ain't slanging [dealing drugs] no more."

I wanted to tell Angel that I was providing him far more than material gain. I was the bearer of soul freedom.

When Joel, the math teacher

at the school, caught wind of what I was doing, he about put me up against the wall. "Are you crazy?" he said. "You walk in here from your privileged life and start delivering oppressive-systems mumbo jumbo to kids who need to learn how to read? Teach them that they need to work their butts off to pass the damn test. Stop giving them an excuse to blame the system."

It is one of the most important lessons I've ever gotten in my life: People closest to a tough situation usually want to find the most direct way out, not the most ideological critique of injustice.

This doesn't mean that systemic critiques of injustice are useless. I, for one, am grateful for my critical-theory background. I think the key lesson is about context and multiple skill sets. A group of students in one situation might need to be reading bell hooks; that same group in a different situation might need to learn how to work slowly through long-form algebra.

The math teacher, Joel, by the way, was indeed a

political radical. He could talk critical theory with the best of them. But he was smart enough to know that the students he was teaching in that context needed algebra more than they needed Audre Lorde.

Joel, in other words, had four key skill sets: the ability to critique systemic injustice, the ability to teach practical skills, and the ability to know when to do which.

The fourth skill? The ability to recognize that helping students learn algebra so they could get their GEDs did not make his systemic critique any less potent or his worldview any less pure.

So often I meet people who think that the only way to social change is one way, *their way*. It is critique or empowerment, justice or service.

The people I admire most have the rare ability to do both, and to see them as parts of the whole rather than wholes unto themselves. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about pluralism from his perspective as a Muslim American.





They'll Know We Are Christians by Our *Jeong*

I GREW UP IN LONDON, Ontario, a small city west of Toronto. As an immigrant, my dad wanted to make sure that his daughters grew up with an accurate understanding of Western culture, so he acculturated us to this strangely foreign world by taking us to non-Korean church services throughout the week. After our regular Korean Presbyterian Church's Sunday service, he took us to a Sunday night Baptist service, a Wednesday night Baptist service, and a Friday night Missionary Alliance Bible study and youth group. Church also served as a free source of English lessons for me and my sister.

My parents loved to go into Toronto and Detroit to attend revival services. These revivals were out-of-this-world experiences, and at times they frightened me. I saw things that I had never seen in any other church visits, and it was during these services that I first witnessed the effects of the Holy Spirit.

My early experiences of the revivals involved adults gathered in the sanctuary for hours, and the only hint as to what they were doing was the eerie muffled sounds of their yelling, laughing, shouting, screaming, and crying. One day, as I tell in my 2018 book *The Homebrewed Christianity Guide to the Holy Spirit*, my curiosity got the better of me. I naively peeked inside the room. What I saw was a jarring scene of the adults in frenzied states of devotion. Some threw their arms up, with tears streaming down their faces, praying and crying out to God. Some people lay on the floor weeping and shaking uncontrollably. I saw my mother, illuminated in the yellow sanctuary light—she stood upright with her hands high above her head, eyes closed and tears rolling down her face as she spoke in tongues.

Five Asian concepts that can deepen our understanding of the Holy Spirit.

by **GRACE
JI-SUN KIM**

Above, the Chinese character for *Chi*, the vital force inherent in all things.

The diversity of the works of the Spirit should not make us afraid but should cause us to celebrate.

This was my earliest encounter with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Due to the inconsistencies of what I saw and my fear, I didn't do much to explore the Spirit for much of my life, until I started teaching theology and encountering people of various backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. As I listened to them, I reflected on

my own background—my Asian culture, religion, and heritage. I believe that knowing one's own culture and heritage is imperative to understand the religious landscape in a globalizing world where cultures clash, immigrants come together, and refugees seek new homes away from home.

Asians comprise 60 percent of the world's population. Major world religions such as Hinduism, Confucianism,

Taoism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and Sikhism were born in Asia. But Christianity soon became Eurocentric, influenced by Greco-Roman philosophy. Today, as Christians grapple with faith in a globalizing world, it may be helpful to see if Asian culture can bring some insights into the Western Eurocentric portrayal of the Holy Spirit.

People who speak multiple languages can attest to how different languages give deeper insight to our concepts and experiences. The five Asian words and concepts that follow can help us enrich and reimagine the Western understanding of the Holy Spirit.

CHI

Asians have always had a sense of spirituality and an understanding of the Spirit world, long before European missionaries came to share the good news. One Asian term used to depict Spirit is *Chi*. It has the same meaning as the Old Testament *ruach* and the New Testament *pneuma*—wind, breath, and life-giving Spirit—but it gives a more embodied sense of the Spirit, which is sometimes lost in Western understanding. In Eurocentric Christianity, the Spirit is often portrayed as “out there,” philosophical and disembodied. *Chi* helps us understand that the Spirit lives in us and is a part of our selves.

Chi is within our bodies. *Chi* is the life-giving Spirit that is part of our daily tasks. When we die, *Chi* leaves our bodies and makes us cold. In Korea, we sometimes greet one another with “How is your *Chi*?” We aim to recognize the *Chi* of our neighbors and loved ones and whether one's *Chi* is low or high. It is in everyday experience of the Spirit in our lives, not just in Sunday worship, that one is filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the West, we are familiar with *taekwondo*, *tai chi*, and *Reiki*, which all deal with the word or concept

of *Chi*. In a *taekwondo* class, the grand master will ask the students to harness their *Chi* as they practice their movements. *Reiki* is a form of healing that uses the energy from one's hands to help bring healing to others. *Tai chi* involves getting in tune with the spirit in the body to help us move and help bring healing to our bodies. *Chi* deepens our understanding of the Holy Spirit as it reminds us of the lived experiences of the Spirit in the context of everyday life.

JEONG

Jeong is a Korean term that permeates the lives of Koreans; it is part of what gives joy, attachment, and meaning to many people's lives. *Jeong* is a difficult word to translate into English, but it can be understood, simply, as love. However, the term *jeong* includes affection, attachment, compassion, kindness, sharing, connection, and sympathy to people and even objects.

Jeong captures the essence of love and affection between people that is sticky and inseparable, like honey between our fingers. This sticky kind of love is difficult to untangle or separate oneself from, and thus makes us stay connected to one another. Even though you may argue or fight with your friend, spouse, or family member, *jeong* will bring you back together. The experience of *jeong* flows out of you to the other to cause connectedness, affection, and love. There is no logical reason or validation of why one experiences *jeong*; it just happens.

Jeong is located within one's heart as well as between individuals. This feeling between individuals may be related to the Eastern notion of collective emotion and the deep-rooted sense of community. There is also a sense of collectiveness or community, as *jeong* diminishes the “I” and the confines that are attached to it and blurs the boundaries between people.

Jeong can be tied in to the concept of the Spirit that reminds us of our connectedness to each other, to the Spirit, and to God. We cannot live alone; we live in community and require *jeong* to help us form bonds, connections, and feelings of love and being loved. Furthermore, we cannot separate ourselves from God, as God is within us and among all of us. It is the Spirit of God that draws us to live in peace with one another, encourages us

to love our neighbor, and provokes us to reach out in love to others.

COMMUNAL CULTURE

Community is another aspect of Eastern Christianity that can help us get a deeper notion of the Holy Spirit. Asian culture is communal. The community and family are more important than the individual. In a communal society, relationships are important and *jeong* sustains

정
JEONG

한
HAN

공동체

COMMUNITY

those relationships. For example, if you are a teacher, your student will always be your student, even after

graduation. This doesn't happen often in the West; when a student graduates they may never again be in touch with their teacher. In Asia, that teacher will always be their teacher.

Language provides some insight. In Korea, a married uncle on the father's side is called "big father" or "little father," according to whether the uncle is younger or older than your father, and the uncle's wife is called "big mother" or "little mother," signifying that the extended family is really just one big family.

In the communal setting in Korea, one never talks about "my school" or "my church"; it is always "our school" or "our church." The Korean word for this is *ouri*. Likewise, one will say "our husband" or "our sister" to express the communal culture of society. This communal culture is also connected to *jeong*, which breaks down the personal and builds on the connectedness of people.

The Asian sense of lingual community helps us recognize that the Holy Spirit is in relation to the two other persons in the Trinity. The individuality of the West overshadows the community in the Trinity, but the East reminds us of its importance. The Asian communal culture adds richness to the West's concept of community and togetherness that can be exemplified in the Trinity.

HAN

The term *han* expresses the pain and suffering that people and communities experience due to unjust systems such as racism, patriarchy, and colonialism. *Han* captures the sufferings in our hearts that leave a woundedness so deep that only something beyond us can bring healing.

Asian liberation theology tries to address such suffering and aims to work toward a theology that frees us from these systems. Once we can address these systemic sins, we can aim to create a more just society. *Han* opens us up to a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit—it is really the Spirit that seeks to liberate us from pain and suffering. The Spirit is the comforter, counselor, and sustainer who can help us relieve ourselves of pain and work toward building a more equitable and just society. The Spirit is the liberator who can bring healing to our deepest wounds and bring wholeness to our broken lives.

MINJUNG THEOLOGY

Minjung theology began in South Korea in the 1970s with the work of Suh Nam-dong and Kim Yong-bock. *Min* means the "people" and *jung* means the "masses." *Minjung* theology grew out of the struggles of poverty and destruction after the Korean War and the division of Korea at the 38th parallel. As South Korea has grown to be more

economically stable since the '70s, newer generations of theologians have sought to re-evaluate the ques-

tion of who are the poor and oppressed *minjung* of Korea. As such, some *minjung* theologians have focused on questions of reunification with North Korea, identifying the *minjung* as all those oppressed in both Koreas.

Minjung theology contends that the authority of the Bible exists for the freedom of the *minjung*. The *minjung* are the starting point for biblical hermeneutics, according to theologian A. Sung Park, as we must read scripture in light of the poor and the suffering to understand how one can work toward liberation. *Minjung* theology reminds us that Christ identifies with those who are suffering and the oppressed. We recognize that the Spirit is also the liberator of our lives and moves us to do social justice in our society. We cannot tie down the Spirit, but the Spirit works in our lives, our communities, and our churches for the good of the people. *Minjung* theology reminds us that the work of the Spirit is through us, among us, and within us to help liberate the poor and the oppressed.

민중

MINJUNG

THE WORKS OF THE SPIRIT

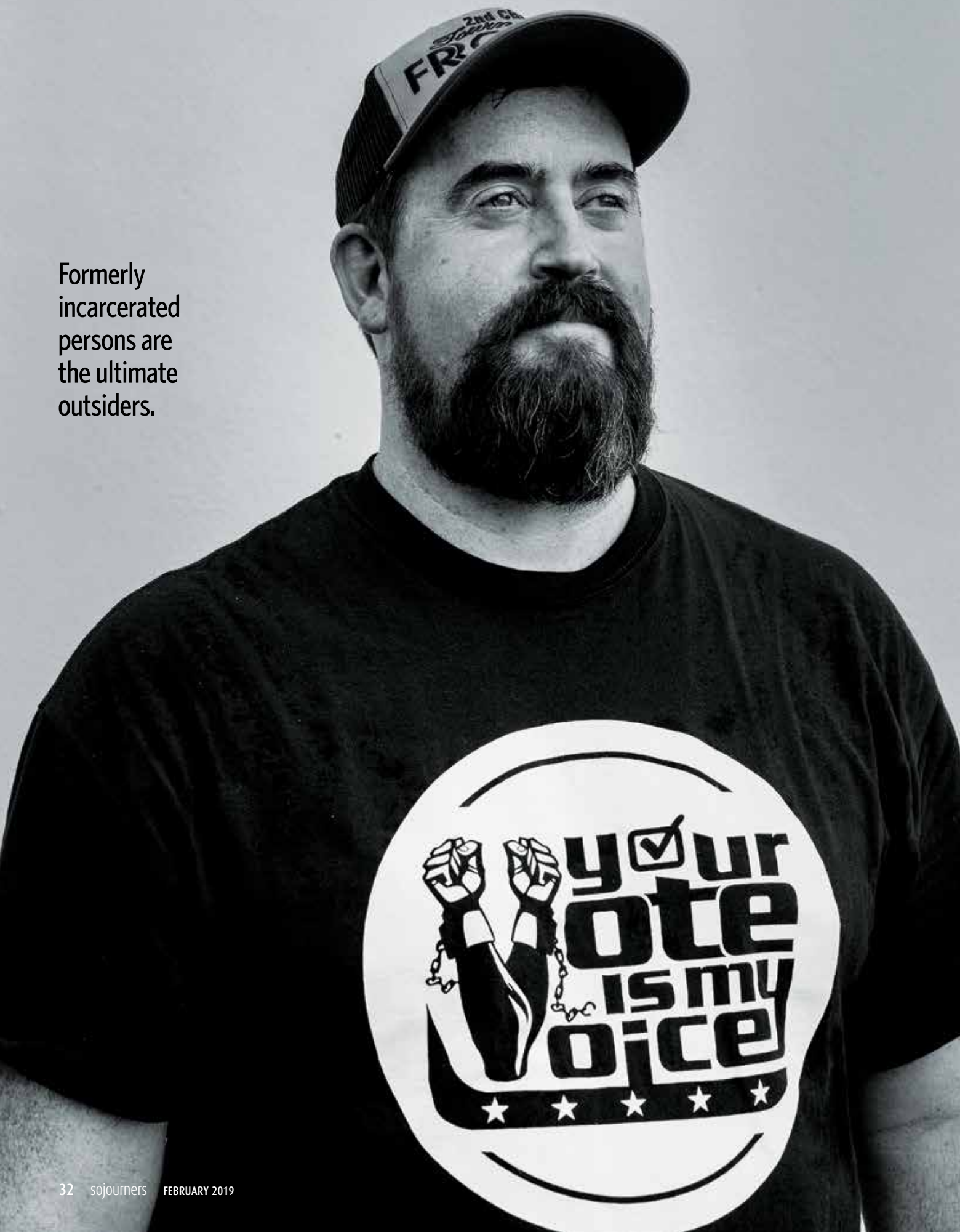
The Spirit moves as it will, and no one can limit the work or movement of the Spirit. Some Christians claim that you are not filled with the Holy Spirit unless you speak in tongues. My mother felt pressured to speak in tongues to be recognized as being filled with the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit fills us in many ways, and our experiences of the embodied Spirit is diverse, extraordinary, and at times unconventional.

The Spirit can be present in revival services but also in the calmness of our hearts. The Spirit can move us to speak in tongues and it can also move us to create community, *jeong*, and life within us. This diversity of the works of the Spirit should not make us afraid but should cause us to celebrate.

The notion that we can control the movement of the Holy Spirit is contradictory to the Christian message of inclusivity. These Asian concepts can help broaden and deepen our understanding of the embodied Spirit that lives in us, transforms us, and empowers us to do God's work in the world. ■

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Formerly
incarcerated
persons are
the ultimate
outsiders.



AN ACT of FORGIVENESS and HEALING

Florida's decision to restore voting rights for people with past convictions brings core Christian teachings into the public square.

by **MYRNA PÉREZ**

LAST FALL'S MIDTERM elections brought the country's single biggest expansion of the right to vote since the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18.

Florida voters passed Amendment 4, a change to the Florida Constitution that automatically restores voting rights to 1.4 million Americans who have been living and working in our communities but politically disenfranchised because of criminal convictions in their past.

Before this amendment, Florida's policy was extra strict—one of permanent disenfranchisement for all felonies, meaning that it did not matter what you did, how long ago it was, or how old you were when you did it. If you had a felony conviction, you could not get your right to vote back unless the government decided to specifically grant you clemency. That meant that even people who had long ago completed probation and parole were still unable to vote.

This outcome in Florida is to be celebrated, for several reasons. Amendment 4 promotes full citizenship and permits more people to participate in the electoral process. It ends a blatant Jim Crow policy. It encourages successful reintegration into the community. But it also brings core Christian teachings into the public square—and it is important that we discuss these teachings because there is still work to be done.

Disenfranchisement of those convicted of felonies is still widespread, if not the norm. The clearest exceptions are Maine and Vermont, where persons never lose their voting rights, even while they are incarcerated. In two states—Iowa and Kentucky—any felony conviction results in permanent disenfranchisement unless the government specifically restores an individual's rights, similar to the approach Florida just changed. Some states permanently disenfranchise certain citizens, depending on the felony conviction. A number of states—18, in fact—disenfranchise returning citizens until all terms of their sentences have been completed, which can end up

Photos by Natalie Keyssar

Neil Volz, political director for the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, finished serving his sentence in 2011.

RESTORATION

is a central theme
in many of the
teachings of Jesus.

being years after they have returned to the community.

What are we getting out of disenfranchising people the criminal justice system has determined are appropriate to be living and working alongside us? What does scripture advise?

Equal persons

Laws disenfranchising community members for past crimes treat people as second-class citizens, but there are no second-class citizens in God's kingdom. God has made "of one blood all nations of people," we are told in Acts. Humans are both God's children and God's creation, and the divinity in our creation and in each of us deserves more respect than second-class citizenship affords.

While human nature may make it difficult to avoid judging persons who have criminal convictions in their past, we do well to remember that God gave his only son to the whole world, and he died for the sins of the whole world, not just those who were never imprisoned for their sins.

The message of equal souls is proclaimed in the parable of the vineyard laborers. A landowner with a vineyard hired laborers in the morning. Some laborers worked all day. Others spent most of the day being idle, behavior obviously disfavored, and worked for as little as an hour. At the end of the day, the landowner paid everyone the same. The laborers who worked all day complained that they should be paid more, but the landowner, decrying human conceptions of desert and merit, decided that the most just course of action was treating them all equally. All the laborers had needs, and the landowner provided accordingly, without distinction among them. Likewise, separating community members into classes of citizens who can vote and classes who cannot fails to recognize the equal worth of all persons before God.

Restoring the fallen

All persons, from ministers to political leaders to high-ranking business

executives, are capable of committing wrongs. Moses killed a person, Peter forsook Jesus, King David had the husband of Bathsheba killed, and John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their ministry trip. For some people, punishment occurs in the form of losing some property or a job. For other people, punishment results in losing one's liberty.

Despite the emotions we may feel, despite our desire for vengeance, as Christians we are obligated to restore the fallen. And with good cause. Moses, David, Peter, John Mark, despite the atrocity of their transgressions—murder, adultery and contract killing, denial of the Savior, and shirking from God's calling—repented, were restored, and went on to serve the Lord and their communities in productive ways.

When persons are imprisoned, they lose their liberty and are separated from their communities. When released, they are expected to lead productive and successful lives. Depriving the formerly imprisoned of voting rights, however, acts at cross-purposes with that expectation because it serves an entirely punitive purpose—it accomplishes nothing to get a person back on the right path. The act of voting, however, is consistent with that expectation because it is a symbol of investment in communities and the country. When a person casts a vote, it is an expression of concern about this country and what happens to it. This is precisely the attitude we want our formerly imprisoned citizens to embrace.

Restoration is the central theme in many of the teachings of Jesus. For example, even though the prodigal son "sinned against heaven" and his father, he was received lovingly and graciously when he returned to his father's house. When his older brother, who had never transgressed against his father, expressed his hurt at the greater generosity bestowed onto someone who had made such poor and sinful choices, the father told him that restoring the prodigal into the family was a joyous occasion appropriately marked by celebration.



In another example, Jesus did not condemn the woman taken in adultery even though her guilt was unquestioned. He told her to sin no more and dismissed her to return to the community from which she was taken.

When we encounter those, like the adulterous woman or the prodigal son, who have transgressed against the laws of God and humanity, adhering to Jesus' teachings means to receive them with the fellowship that will restore them. We should not underestimate the effect that our fellowship, love, and spiritual values will have on restoring those who have fallen.

Forgiving the wrongdoer

The Bible leaves no doubt that we are supposed to forgive others, as emphasized in the book of Philemon, the Lord's Prayer, and many other places. We are to forgive others because we ourselves need our Lord's forgiveness. One of the challenges of forgiveness is that wrongdoing often affects more than just the immediate victim and perpetrator. Because we live in communities, we are interconnected. It is precisely this extended effect and interconnectedness, however, that requires us to consider the ancillary effects of a punishment such as disenfranchisement.

At a larger level, disenfranchisement laws impact entire communities. At its most obvious, communities with high rates of disenfranchised persons have fewer votes to cast, and less political influence. More subtly, however, disenfranchisement laws are thought to affect the voter participation rates even among those eligible to vote. It makes sense: Voting is a social activity that is reinforced when more of us participate. Fewer people engaging in this behavior means fewer people to model it for others.

At the family level, disenfranchisement also takes a great toll because a parent's political participation can influence a child's decision to vote. Not only do parents provide basic information such as where to register and vote, they also can provide campaign-related information that children are unlikely to get from formal schooling. Disenfranchising a parent may discourage the entire family from civic participation.

Bearing grudges outside the prison walls, against our very neighbors, doesn't



Nubian Roberts organizing volunteers for the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition in September. At left, a volunteer hangs a card with information on the restoration campaign.

just damage our democracy. It also tarnishes the joy we are supposed to feel when one of us starts their new life outside of prison. When the woman with 10 silver coins loses one, as told in Luke's gospel, she diligently looks until she finds it. She lights lamps. She sweeps. When she finally finds it, she rejoices with her neighbors. Or when a man with 100 sheep loses one, he leaves the 99 and goes into the mountains to seek the one that went astray. When he finds it, he is more joyous over the formerly lost sheep than over the ones that did not go astray.

Obviously, these parables are not concerned with coins or sheep—they are concerned with lost souls. And they teach us two things: First, we need to put work into helping the lost be found. Second, rather than being angry at the person for being lost, we can be joyous that we found them. Restoring voting rights to former prisoners upon release is a clear statement that we forgive them and that the community is going to work with them to get their life back on track.

Loving our enemies

Since Cain killed Abel, humans have mistreated each other. We all have wronged others, and we are all capable of being wronged. While we may struggle with how to make sense of the injustice and harm we experience at the hands of others, God's instruction for our response is clear: We are called to love.

The dictionary defines an enemy as someone antagonistic toward another. The

Bible, however, encourages us to regard an enemy as a brother or sister, as in 2 Thessalonians, or as a neighbor, as in the parable of the good Samaritan. Individuals put in prison for their transgressions are our brothers and sisters. When they're released from prison, they're our neighbors. Despite our foibles and how they manifest, God loves us. God loves us even though we are at times enemies to God and at times enemies to others. It is precisely because God loves our enemies that we must love our enemies.

There is no naiveté in this position. Loving enemies is a tough task. There are three important biblical lessons, however, that can make the task easier. One, we are misplacing our efforts when we focus on the sinner. "[W]e wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Two, even the most heinous actors can become right with God. We should remember that St. Paul, before his conversion, murdered and abused Christians. Three, as noted by Martin Luther King Jr., "love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." Hating our enemies only brings more hate into the mix.

We cannot love our enemies—our sisters and brothers and our neighbors—when we focus on additional ways to punish them after our criminal justice system has said they can be safely released. Denying the franchise to persons who have returned to

the community focuses on what a person did to get their voting rights abridged, not on repairing the damage done or healing the community.

Welcoming the outsider

Formerly incarcerated persons are the ultimate outsiders. They have been banished by the state from their communities and forced to live away from home and their loved ones. When they return, they frequently are told that there are certain areas where they cannot live and certain jobs they cannot have. In the Bible, outsiders are given different names—aliens, strangers, foreigners, travelers, and sojourners—but Christians are called to welcome them all and treat them hospitably.

These obligations remain even when the outsider has committed a wrong. Before God banished people from the Garden of Eden for their disobedience, God clothed them in garments made to protect them from the harsh life they would lead outside the garden. When God punished Cain for killing his brother Abel by forcing him to wander the world, God put a mark on Cain to protect him from being killed by those who found him. Despite their sins, God looked out for the well-being of these people and provided them with necessities for starting over in a new place.

These lessons provide powerful guidance for how we treat outsiders rejoining our community from prison. We are called to welcome them and to give them the basics to start over. Welcoming them means honoring their right to participate in our civic institutions. The basic necessities must include the tools to obtain what is needed for themselves and their loved ones. Restoring their right to vote helps with both.

Florida's vote in favor of restoring voting rights for people with past convictions is a powerful call for improving our democracy. But it's not just about restoring people's voting rights: It is a crucial step toward restoring a person's full humanity and self-determination. It is one of the most important ways to help people reintegrate into society. It is a vote of values. ■

Myrna Pérez is deputy director of the Brennan Center's Democracy Program and leader of the center's Voting Rights and Elections project.



By Faith-Marie Zamblé

The Art of **Transcendence**

Mimi Mutesa, a Ugandan-American visual artist, defies the church's expectations.

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IN THE SPAN OF OUR HOURLONG conversation, Mimi Mutesa, an emerging Ugandan-American photographer-videographer and an undergraduate student at Calvin College, a Christian Reformed school in Michigan, easily gives her thoughts on everything from the complexities of blackness to the policing of women's bodies. However, when I ask her how her faith influences her work, there is a brief pause on the other end of the line.

"I don't think it's ever crossed my mind until this moment," she says. When pressed, she explains that she's "trying to tackle enough issues" in her art as it is, and evangelical culture has "far too many other problems" for her to address. Mutesa assures me that she still identifies as a person of faith but maintains that her relationship with God is "separate" from her relationship to art and social justice.

Perhaps this separation is a necessary one. It's hard to imagine the average evangelical church embracing Mutesa's colorful portraits of nude black joy. Her sentiments echo an unspoken opinion held by many young Christians, that if you want to be radical like Jesus was, you must do so on the margins of Christianity. More traditional folks may see this rush to the margins as a slick avoidance of the Christian call to profess one's faith, or a symptom of postmodern discomfort with absolute truth. But what is more likely is that millennials

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everything which passes through the senses, how much more ought we to doubt things contrary to these senses ... such as the existence of God or of the soul or similar things over which there is always dispute and contention." These are not words one expects from a person whose work is featured prominently in Vatican City, but the name

All art is the result of an imperfect human being immoderately aiming for transcendence.

Leonardo da Vinci lends itself to all manner of exceptions.

Another artist, a drunken brawler whose path to fame includes committing murder, also painted his way into churches and chapels around Rome. He is commonly known by the name of his hometown: Caravaggio. This arrogant thirtysomething drew public ire with his numerous depictions of

the naked male form, some going so far as to accuse him of turning a church's roof into a "brothel." It's fortunate this artist, Michelangelo, didn't listen to them, because if he had, the Sistine Chapel as we know it would not exist.

These men give rise to uncomfortable questions about what makes someone a Christian artist. Is a Christian artist someone who creates paintings or sculptures exclusively about the passion of Christ? What if the artists are not working for *solī Deo gloria* but for a paycheck? Should

Christian art be a tool of conversion? What if the paintings are meant to scare illiterate peasants into papal obedience?

These are complex questions, but when I examine the life and works of the Old Masters, I am in awe that said work exists at all. All art is the result of an imperfect human being immoderately aiming for transcendence.

The composer George Handel—a

Continued on Page 39



Mimi Mutesa, above, and one of her photos from a series highlighting the sisterhood of East African women.

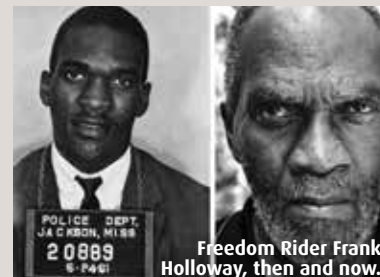
of faith, especially millennials of color, want to engage with values traditionally cherished by the church but see modern-day Christianity as a direct hindrance to that sort of exploration, since significant portions of the church have been antagonists in struggles for social equality.

Reticence to conflate personal faith with artistic vision is deeply connected to a complex historical dialectic between the arts and the church: Mutesa's midconversational pause is supported by precedent.

An imperfect human being

For example, a visual artist who lived during the 15th century wrote in his treatise on painting: "If we doubt the certainty of

New & Noteworthy



Freedom Rider Frank Holloway, then and now.

Freedom Ride

The expanded edition of *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders* revisits a pivotal civil rights campaign. Filled with mugshots and recent interviews of several riders who were arrested in Jackson, Miss., *Breach of Peace* honors a historic act of protest. Vanderbilt University Press

One Body, Many Parts

Together at the Table: Diversity Without Division in the United Methodist Church, by Bishop Karen P. Oliveto, the UMC's first openly LGBTQ bishop, is timely as the denomination nears a potential split over sexuality. Oliveto outlines how her denomination can remain whole. Westminster John Knox Press

Courageous Faith

Moral Leadership for a Divided Age: 14 People Who Dared to Change Our World, by David P. Gushee and Colin Holtz, examines the faith and courage of Harriet Tubman, Oscar Romero, Malala Yousafzai, Martin Luther King Jr., and others in hope that their lives will inspire new leaders. Brazos Press

Holy Peace

One Breath at a Time: A Skeptic's Guide to Christian Meditation, by J. Dana Trent, shows Christians how to expand their prayer to include meditation. Trent examines scripture and the history of the church to help believers tap into holy peace. Upper Room Books

The New Digital Divide

TWENTY YEARS AGO, when we talked about the “digital divide” we meant things like low-income people’s access to computers and the internet. But according to a recent study from Common Sense Media, that turn-of-the-century gap has largely closed. Seventy percent of families with an annual household income below \$30,000 now have a computer at home, and 75 percent have high-speed internet access. In addition, low-income families are near the national average for access to mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets.

But another digital divide is emerging that could have more dangerous long-term consequences.

Researchers have discovered a lot about how brain development and personality formation happen, and their lessons keep coming back to the importance of real-world experiences and face-to-face human interactions, especially



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as well as \$8 billion-plus yearly on hardware and software, with little to show for it so far in the way of improved learning.

“I am convinced the devil lives in our phones and is wreaking havoc on our children,” former Facebook executive assistant Athena Chavarria told *The New York Times*.

Speaking of the effects of digital technology on his five kids, Chris Anderson, former editor of *Wired*, said, “On the scale between candy and crack cocaine, it’s closer to crack cocaine.”

Even Bill Gates’ kids didn’t have cell phones until they were teenagers, and Steve Jobs’ kids never played on an iPad while growing up. One of the most popular schools among families linked to the tech industry is a Waldorf school that bans digital technology. Its students use paper workbooks and wooden pencils and look things up in encyclopedias. The kids learn fractions by cutting up food items into halves, quarters, etc.

But, of course, private schools like that are expensive. Keeping kids away from screens outside of school is, as anyone who’s raised children in this century knows, incredibly labor-intensive. And labor is never free. A family

that keeps a parent at home must live on one full-time income, which is impossible for most folks in this era of stagnant and declining wages. The only alternative—one increasingly popular among the upper crust—is a full-time nanny with tech-avoidance in their contract.

In America, the legend goes, even if you’re poor, if you work hard enough you can become anything you want to be. But to live that dream, you must have the imagination to see new possibilities for yourself and the problem-solving skills to figure out how to achieve them. Those are precisely the traits that are stunted when kids are raised and educated by screens.

You don’t develop them by watching a YouTube video. You’re more likely to get them from playing made-up games with your friends, trying to build an improvised go-cart out of scrap wood, or wandering around a forest by yourself. The diminishment of human potential that comes with the loss of those childhood experiences is perhaps the greatest cost of our rush toward a virtual world. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Imagination and problem-solving skills are stunted when kids are raised and educated by screens.

in the childhood years. To avoid passivity and mental laziness in their children, many high-income parents are starting to limit their children’s time on digital devices. Common Sense Media found that the children of upper-income families spent half as much time in front of screens as did children of low-income families.

Several private schools are even dialing back their reliance on digital technology. Meanwhile, in many public schools, students are being issued Chromebooks or iPads and shunted into online learning programs. According to *Education Week*, American schools spend \$3 billion per year on digital content,

Continued from Page 37

character study in intemperance and dramatics—famously said of his *Messiah*, “Whether I was in my body or out of my body as I wrote it I know not. God knows.” This is what artists aim for, a synchronicity between that which they can control (materiality) and that which lies beyond.

Power, privilege, and positivity

But what often lies beyond the control of artists of color such as Mutesa is bigotry—how others see them. Historical whitewashing and institutional racism are topics that black contemporary artists Kerry James Marshall, Carrie Mae Weems, Mickalene Thomas, and Kara Walker explore thoroughly in their work. The art world has not been a friend to people of color or women, and in many minds neither has the church. In beautiful, surprising, and grotesque ways, Marshall, Weems, Thomas, and Walker detail what it means to live on the fringes of society.

Because of their examples, most young artists of color are situating their work at the nexus of power and privilege, using the words “postcolonialism,” “representation,” and “trauma” in their artist statements. These artists exist in direct opposition to the canon of Western art: “Christian” art by European men that has become the standard for “good” art, due to gatekeepers who enforce cultural hegemony.

So when Mutesa pauses in response to my question about her art’s connection to faith, it makes perfect sense. The question itself is fraught with meaning, especially now, when our political climate looks like one of Hieronymus Bosch’s apocalyptic paintings, in part due to 81 percent of white evangelical Christians who happily claimed a share of the blame for the nation’s current woes.

It’s tradition for artists to rebel against the way things are and use their work to make the world better. But I have seen far too many artists of color put themselves in danger by making art that is meant to upset white audiences or expose some horrid racial history. This sort of work is necessary but often also ugly or depressing; some of its creators talk about how their mental health suffers for the work. Mutesa is aware of this.

She has created a few works that might be considered political, such as one that



From *Roma*

HOW TO LOVE

BEFORE WE GET to the best movies of 2018, let’s talk about the most memorable moments of this year in cinema. Neil Armstrong casting his daughter’s bracelet into a canyon on the moon in **First Man**, a story as much about one person’s grief and desire to connect with another as about our species’ ambition and desire to conquer the final frontier.

The dawning realization, in **What They Had**, of why Robert Forster steps out of the bedroom he has shared with Blythe Danner for 60 years, sparing her more suffering and loving her until the end.

A deceptively simple scene—a conversation in a car going from one neighborhood to another—that’s a revelation of social inequality and how near yet far we live from each other. In minutes, **Widows** covers centuries of relationships of power.

An unexpected funeral in **The Gospel of Eureka** that breaks the audience’s heart and calls forth our loves.

And the titular character **Christopher Robin**, who holds Pooh Bear’s hand as they walk through a field, as though Terrence Malick is directing the film.

As for the 10 best movies, I’ll nominate: **Isle of Dogs** for its invitation to compassion; **Lizzie**, a life-affirming film because of how seriously it takes killing; **The Wife**, a challenging tale of personal talent constricted by prejudice; and **Bad Times at the El Royale**,

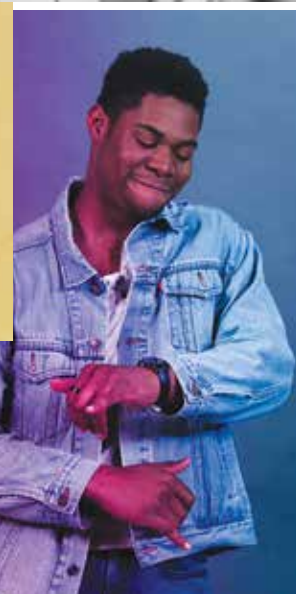
a satirical mirror of America in which Cynthia Erivo gives the year’s most striking performance.

There’s also the Mr. Rogers documentary, **Won’t You Be My Neighbor?**, which is, like its subject, both delightful and radical; **Annihilation**, a mystical science fiction experience; **Leave No Trace**, which respects the personal cost of military service enough to critique its aftermath; **The Happy Prince**, Rupert Everett’s lament about how artists often squeeze creativity from sorrow; and the kinetic and wise **Blindspotting**, which treats racism and toxic masculinity as problems that require neighborhood solutions.

And in **Roma**, the year’s greatest film—and perhaps one of the greatest films ever made—too many outstanding moments to count: the babysitter Cleo walking into water to protect the vulnerable; the crash of violence amid the mundaneness of buying a child’s crib; the beyond-astonishing birth sequence; the playing of a Spanish-language version of an iconic English show tune, totally reorienting the meaning we thought we knew.

“I don’t know how to love him,” sings Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. But in *Roma* Cleo teaches the rest of us how. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



Photos by Mimi Mutesa, including "Sunlight is My Favorite Color," above.

involved sexist quotes from Donald Trump painted on the bodies of naked women. But when I bring up such works, Mutesa pivots the conversation, saying simply, "There are a lot of artists that address our systematically prejudiced judicial system, police brutality against black men, and disproportional rates of incarceration. I'm so infinitely grateful for artists that give their art to that form of activism. But I just want to add some positivity to the narrative."

Care, kindness, and life

And she succeeds: Drawing from the bright colors of her Ugandan upbringing, Mutesa's work provides some much-needed light and perspective. She uses soft lighting and vibrant hues, highlighting the contrast of brown skin instead of melting it into a dark background. The series "Triple F Bomb," which features a quintet of plus-size models, calls to mind Peter Paul Rubens' love of fleshy figures, while her portraiture in "Sunlight Is My Favorite Color" is an aesthetic cousin of Toyin Ojih Odutola's paintings.

Mutesa's photographs do away with what Carrie Mae Weems calls women's tendency

to "obscure the clarity of themselves." Planted in time and place, the women in Mutesa's images are fully human and present. They aren't wearing crosses or reading scripture, but they look as though, despite it all, they have chosen life.

Mutesa said her faith is separate from her art, but I don't know if that's true. At the Christian college I attended, in an upper-level visual arts class in which students were required to draw nude models, my professor said that drawing is an act of paying attention to someone else, an act of humanization where we must recognize the *imago dei* in those outside of ourselves.

If this is the standard for Christian art, Mimi Mutesa certainly meets it. Her images reflect a deep belief in welcoming the "other": They are imbued with a sense of care and kindness.

And if recognizing the *imago dei* in those outside of ourselves is also the standard for the church, the church would do well to dialogue with artists like Mutesa. They would have a lot to discuss. ■

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist and writer in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Reviewed by Kathryn Post

ESCAPING THE PATRIARCHY

Women Talking, by Miriam Toews. Bloomsbury Publishing.

SEXUAL ABUSE is not about sex: It's about power.

At least that's what Ona, the female protagonist of Miriam Toews' novel *Women Talking*, insists in the aftermath of one of the most horrifying incidents of sexual abuse in recent history. Toews' book is based on true events: Between 2005 and 2009, more than 100 Mennonite women and girls in a remote community in Bolivia were raped at night by what they believed were demons punishing them for their sins. These attacks were perpetrated by men in the community who used modified animal anesthetics to drug and rape the women in their own homes. The victims' ages ranged from 3 to 65.

Toews' novel is a fictional account of a conversation between eight of these women. As Toews' story develops, the rapists are imprisoned, other men of the community have gone to bail them out, and the women—illiterate and unaware of what



Despite this, the novel is a raw, riveting portrait of a society where authority lacks accountability. The women discuss how the community's leaders dismissed the attacks as products of the "wild female imagination" and how the leaders referred to the rapists only as "unwelcome visitors" even after the truth was uncovered. The leaders also denied the women counseling because they were unconscious during the attacks.

"The entire colony of Molotschna is built on the foundation of patriarchy," a woman named Salome says. "[T]he women live out their days as mute, submissive and obedient servants. Animals. Fourteen-year-old boys are expected to give us orders, to determine our fates, to vote on our excommunications, to speak at the burials of our own babies while we remain silent, to interpret the Bible for us, to lead us in worship, to punish us! We are not *members* ... we are commodities."

Even more disturbing is the way the community uses religion as a vehicle of oppression. From the outset of their conversation, the women wrestle with having to ask their rapists for forgiveness to ensure their salvation: Will they be damned if they do not reconcile with the

men who violated them and their mothers, sisters, and daughters?

"The twin pillars that guard the entrance to the shrine of religion are storytelling and cruelty," Epp observes while the women offer supplications. For the women, faith denies freedom and requires obedience.

Even so, eight women courageously decide to show up, speak up, and resist a patriarchal system inextricably tied to their faith. *Women Talking* is a poignant and timely reminder of what happens when religion is corrupted, patriarchy is the status quo, and those in power are not held in check.

"It's the quest for power ... that is responsible for these attacks," says Ona, Salome's sister, "because in their quest for power, they needed to have those they'd have power over, and those people are us." ■

Kathryn Post is an editorial assistant of Sojourners.

Reviewed by Rhea Williams

BEAUTIFUL BARBARIANS

Barbarican, by Mona Haydar. The Most.

SYRIAN. AMERICAN. Muslim. Woman. These distinctions of religion, geography, and gender are sometimes considered worlds of their own, but rapper Mona Haydar is used to navigating between them as a daughter of Syrian immigrants to the U.S. who grew up in Flint, Mich. Her experiences of embodying a multicultural identity in a country teeming with bigotry are the basis of her new EP, *Barbarican*, a collection of powerful songs that challenge rigid notions about who gets to consider themselves American and who gets left out and called a barbarian.

Haydar emerged onto the music scene in March 2017 when she released a colorful music video for her song "Hijabi (Wrap My Hijab)." The video featured her, eight months pregnant, surrounded by hijab-clad women as she rapped about diversity and the freedom to practice hijab, an often-criticized tradition in the West. *Billboard* named "Hijabi (Wrap My Hijab)" one of the best protest songs of 2017, creating anticipation for more music from Haydar. With *Barbarican*, Haydar has delivered a searing follow-up.

Opening with the line, "If they're civilized, I'd rather stay savage," *Barbarican* celebrates the colonized, specifically those who have suffered from the racist equating of "brown" and "black" to "backward" and "barbarian," and "modern" to "white."

In the song "Barbarian," Haydar examines the ways in which colonialism seeps into the minds of people of color, teaching them to hate aspects of themselves. With dynamic beats and catchy refrains, she creatively subverts colonialism by using its own words against it. Haydar even fights stigma

Women Talking is a reminder of what happens when religion is corrupted, patriarchy is the status quo, and those in power are not held in check.

lies beyond the boundaries of their community—gather to decide between three courses of action: do nothing, stay and fight, or leave. As they debate, their dialogue is infused with theological discussions and surprisingly dark humor. These conversations give insight into the community's culture, religiosity, and the ways that each woman copes with her personal grief.

Oddly, the voice of August Epp, the meeting's minutes taker and the only man present, dominates Toews' narrative. This story about women resisting a patriarchy gives an unexpected amount of attention to a man.

surrounding mental health, by wrestling with both her experience of postpartum depression in her song “Lifted” and her reaction to the suicide of a friend in “Suicide Doors,” which features singer-songwriter Drea d’Nur.

Haydar has a degree in Christian ethics from Union Theological Seminary, where she studied with black liberation theologian James Cone. She references her degree in the song “Miss Me,” which features Syrian-American hip-hop artist and peace activist Omar Offendum and addresses others’ dislike of her religion. “Praying for your soul to be saved from white supremacy. But you always come for me. Masters in theology. White Jesus isn’t saving me.”

“Miss Me” illuminates a cruel irony: Even social justice-minded Christians who think they’ve helped to “liberate” the Muslim woman from stereotypes have just put her in a new box. She’s only allowed to be an activist, only allowed to talk to us about her concerns, when having a Muslim perspective is valuable to *our* social justice initiatives.

In *Barbarican*, Haydar expresses indignation at white supremacy’s ability to terrorize the bodies of women of color and later profit from them. To highlight this, Haydar uses the examples of the white celebrity Kylie Jenner’s lip kits, makeup products designed to make lips bigger. In a world where women from “the East” are veiled caricatures that eat spiced food with henna-marked hands, the only way our features can be recognized and celebrated is if they are appropriated by white women.

Listening to Haydar’s lyric, “They don’t want to see me as American,” in the song “American,” I remember times when I haven’t felt “Indian enough” or “American enough.” Haydar doesn’t forsake one of her identities for the other, but instead holds them in tension, showing that there is space in the world for nonwhite and non-Christian Americans. She radically centers and normalizes the lives of people who live in the margins. By healing their wounds, she takes their power back from their conquerors.

“We don’t let them win,” she says in her EP’s opening track. “We’re beautiful barbarians.” ■

Rhea Williams is donor services assistant at Sojourners.

Reviewed by Julie Polter

MYSTIC RESISTANCE

***Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story*, written and directed by Martin Doblmeier. journeyfilms.com.**

ONE OF THE most influential figures in the African-American civil rights movement did not march, organize, or speak at mass rallies. Mystic Howard Thurman found spiritual revelation in nature, championed the use of dance, theater, and non-traditional music in worship, and incorporated silence in his sermons. But his books, preaching, and teaching provided vital philosophical and spiritual underpinnings for the nonviolent resistance methods championed by Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders.

Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story, airing on PBS in February, is a documentary by Martin Doblmeier, the award-winning creator of films on faith including *An American Conscience*, *Chaplains*, and *Bonhoeffer*. In this rich, one-hour portrait of Thurman, civil rights leaders Jesse Jackson Sr., Rep. John Lewis, and others—as well as scholars such as Alton B. Pollard III, Walter Earl Fluker, Luther E. Smith, and Lerita Coleman Brown—offer insights on Thurman’s life, legacy, and the dynamic tension between contemplation and social justice.

The film’s title is from Thurman’s book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, published in 1949—said to have been carried by King and often cited by other civil rights leaders. Thurman wrote: “The masses of [people] live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them?”

Thurman’s lifelong engagement with this question produced wisdom as vital for our day as it was for his.

Born in 1899, Thurman grew up surrounded by the strictures and brutality of Jim Crow-era Florida. He found spiritual solace and inspiration in nature from his earliest days. Education was also a passion. Thurman became a professor of Christian



theology and dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University in 1932.

Thurman first explored pacifism as a spiritual resource as a young man, in part through the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Quaker mystic Rufus Jones. His commitment to nonviolence as both philosophy and tactic was cemented during a

delegation to India, Burma, and Sri Lanka that he co-led in 1935-36 with his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman. He was profoundly affected by the encounter with other religious traditions and saw parallels between the brutal British colonial rule and the white supremacist power structures underlying U.S. racial segregation. He met Mahatma Gandhi and discussed the use of nonviolent resistance to confront oppressive governments.

Thurman, however, did not later join the civil rights movement on the streets, for which he was criticized. His influence was through his books (more than 20 in his lifetime), co-founding a multiracial church, and his direct influence on others through academic and pastoral encounters.

Thurman’s later tenure as dean of Boston University’s Marsh Chapel from 1953 to 1965 overlapped with King’s doctoral studies there, although Doblmeier notes that they were not considered close. But Thurman visited King in the hospital after a 1958 stabbing, urging him to take time away for silence and listening. After healing from his injuries, King went to India, which was for him, as it was for Thurman, a journey pivotal for his commitment to nonviolent resistance.

Thurman saw the pursuit of justice as nonnegotiable. But as *Backs Against the Wall* makes clear, he also invited all to rooted spirituality as a source of courage and transcendence. “All social issues are temporary and brief,” he said. “Go deep.” ■

Julie Polter is managing editor of Sojourners.

'Because of my chains...'

WHAT DO YOU see in the photo at right? Name all the objects. Spend a moment.

Hillside erosion. A semi-trailer truck with sleeper unit and maple leaf logo. Chain-link fence. Two people. U-locks at necks. Banner. Ecclesiastical stole. Heavy-grade straight chain. Clerical collar. Tree trunk. Small orange ribbon.

What is the subject of the photo? What does the camera leave out?

Photographer Murray Bush took this photo last year on May 25 on Burnaby Mountain in British Columbia. The truck is for horizontal drilling and belongs to the firm Kinder Morgan, one of the largest energy infrastructure companies in North America. The company specializes in pipelines and petroleum terminals and is the first pipeline operator to purchase a fleet of oil tankers. The fence marks a boundary—and contested space.

The two people, Laurel Dykstra and Lini Hutchings, are members of Salal + Cedar, a Christian commu-



Murray Bush

Laurel Dykstra and Lini Hutchings on Burnaby Mountain in British Columbia.

over Dykstra's shoulders was made by the liturgical arts guild of St. Catherine's Anglican Church in North Vancouver. Its patchwork of batik fern and leaf patterns reflects the evergreen temperate rainforest of the region. The clerical collar recalls that a priest belongs to God at the service of all.

The photo is dominated by one subject—the trunk of a Douglas fir, a pioneer species in the Fraser River watershed, about 200 feet tall and a century or two old, marked by surveyors in an area where there had been recent cutting. Firs of this age and older produce most of the cones for community regeneration. All this on Burnaby Mountain, pushed up from a vast alluvial plain 5 million years ago and held in trust by Coast Salish peoples for at least 5,000 years.

What does the camera leave out? A nesting pair of northern flickers. Eagle Creek below, a salmon-spawning stream. Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline and

tank facility expansion for shipping extreme-extraction bitumen crude from the Alberta tar sands. The hundreds of arrests over several months to block oil tankers from entering the port of Vancouver, stop clear cutting and construction, and protest invasion by the settler colonial state and extractive corporations into First Nations territory without consent.

"We prayed, read poetry, and sang psalms for six hours while attached to the tree," Dykstra said.

Look back at the photo. What do you see? I hear Paul's letter to Jesus followers in Philippi 20 centuries ago: "And because of my chains, most of the believers have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear" (1:14). I see a creation community fighting for life. ■

Rose Marie Berger, senior associate editor at Sojourners, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.

What does the camera leave out?

nity in Coast Salish territory. The lock-on hardware around them—the U-locks and chain—is to delay removal by the 17 Royal Canadian Mounted Police who showed up. In 2015, the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster appointed Dykstra as a sort of "priest to the Fraser River watershed."

Michif visual artist Christi Belcourt designed the "Water Is Life" banner. The image, according to Belcourt, depicts a pregnant woman with ceremonial markings on her face and clothing, raising her fist in the air. Water courses through her womb before returning to the clouds that send rain to replenish her container.

The Salal + Cedar stole draped



Hot Lips and Holy Hands

OUR MOUNTING ANXIETIES are confronted in the psalm for the final Sunday of this month. Not the wear and tear of personal difficulties, but stress, fear, and exasperation at the flourishing of injustice, denial, mendacity, and exploitation. All exacerbated by the frenzied input of the media in which we are saturated. The psalmist speaks: Be still before the Lord and wait patiently. Do not fret over those who prosper, who succeed in evil schemes (see Psalm 37). The psalms do not prescribe withdrawal, tranquilizers, or techniques of self-calming, but stillness “before the Lord.”

Those who are emotionally tortured by the enormity of the damage being done to humanity by so many powerful people need a renewed spirituality for activists that derives its strength from a deepened intimacy with God. The psalmist shows the frankest awareness of the howling frustration that wreaks havoc with our physical and mental health and shreds our emotional availability to one another, and yet is certain that the only ultimate antidote is personal exposure to the joy and tenderness of God. “Take delight in the

Lord, and you will be given the desires of your heart” (verse 4). Those who listen closely will hear echoes of this in other readings. Very tellingly Jeremiah urges, “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord” (17:7). Trusting in God, but more than that, experiencing the indwelling of God in our hearts and the pulsing trust from that heart living in us.



Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. He lives in Washington, D.C.

[FEBRUARY 3]

No Experience Needed

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

IT IS EASY to overuse the word “prophetic” and tread it flat. We need scriptures like these to restore authenticity to our language about prophetic calling and ministry. Jeremiah recounts his experience of God’s call to be a prophet when he was still a youth. He resisted the call because he was still embedded in a culture weighted toward the kind of authority supposedly earned by years of experience. But a prophet must be disembedded from her culture to address that culture with God’s authority. And “experience” is often just a code word for initiation into the values of an unjust order. God challenges the normal requirement of experience, placing the prophet solely under the authority of God’s own promise. No experience necessary! I am reminded of God’s mordant skepticism toward society’s conventional valuation of experience in Charles Péguy’s great poem “The Mystery of the Holy Innocents.” Péguy writes: “As for what you call experience, your experience, I

call it waste, diminution, decrease, the loss of hope.”

In Jesus’ confrontation at Nazareth with those who knew him only too well, he quotes a bit of folk wisdom: “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.” By definition, a prophet is an outsider: She

Prophets take their stand where God’s incandescent holy love meets human resistance.

thinks outside the categories that form the common-sense worldview. And so she is drawn to the stranger and those on the fringe who are more likely to be open to acts of God invisible to conventional eyes. Jesus then scandalizes his former playmates by mentioning that the only successes Elijah and Elisha had at healing were with pagan foreigners. The congregation instantly

changes into a lynch mob from which Jesus narrowly escapes.

Paul’s praise of love in 1 Corinthians 13 challenges our prophetic practice: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.” Prophets take their stand where God’s incandescent holy love meets human resistance. It is a perilous place where prophetic actions can insidiously draw on the dark energy of hostility and self-righteousness, and utterly forfeit their authenticity.

[FEBRUARY 10]

Net Fishing

Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 138;
1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

IN THE HEBREW scriptures, the expression “seeing God’s face” usually refers to a transcendent experience of divine presence that could overcome worshipers during the liturgies of the Jerusalem temple. This week we hear Isaiah telling of such an experience in which he accepted God’s call to be a prophet. Aware of his foul mouth, and the foul mouths of his compatriots, Isaiah is horrified by God’s call, but a seraph is dispatched from the throne bearing a burning coal to scorch Isaiah’s mouth, cauterizing its infection. Perhaps this searing image will have a fresh intensity for us this year in which we feel a mounting horror at the contempt for truth being cultivated by so many of our political leaders. Lies, propaganda, misinformation—our social world is increasingly riddled with abusive falsity.

Now it is impossible to represent God in any way without undergoing a searing operation by the divine physician to restore our passion for truth-telling and heal our complicity in a culture of lies. How would our worship services need

to change to be the setting for the kind of operation that Isaiah underwent?

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus abruptly announces to Simon and the sons of Zebedee that from now on they would be catching women, men, and children, not fish. How imaginatively vivid is this image for many of us? Often images fail to resonate unless we have physical memories associated with

them: adding yeast to dough, sowing seeds, casting nets. I go fishing with nets off the beach at Waikanae in New Zealand every year, chatting with Māori families as they work alongside my own family, everyone looking forward to their day's catch. It is a very communal scene: all hands on deck, everyone involved, some wading far and deep, others untangling and pulling. The felt sense of Jesus' words ran through me a few months ago at my wedding when I looked out over a sea of guests; so many whom God had ushered into my nets, one way or another, during fifty years of ordained ministry! What abundance! How can we listen to Jesus' words about being fishers of people without tears of gratitude?

[FEBRUARY 17]

Wisdom of 'Woe'

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1;
1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 6:17-26

LUKE'S VERSION of the beatitudes, given by Jesus standing "on a level place," have a strong claim to be closer to the original than Matthew's more familiar Sermon on the Mount version. In Luke, the poor whom Jesus congratulates are the exploited and the indigent. Matthew, however, has massaged poverty into a spiritual category: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This made it impossible for him to present the other side of Jesus' pronouncement in which (according to Luke) he declares, "Woe to you who are rich ... woe to you are full ... woe to you who are laughing now." Matthew could hardly spiritualize this—"woe to you who are rich in spirit" just wouldn't work. So Matthew dropped the "woes." We are in debt to Luke for faithfully presenting the other side of Jesus' beatitudes. God's passion to redress the plight of the struggling poor necessarily involves judgment on those who ruthlessly corner the earth's resources—God's gifts for the support of all—for their own power and unjust wealth. There is no rest for the Spirit of God until a just sharing levels the field. No wonder Matthew's version has been more popular in the church, muffling the radical implications of God's promise to level the field.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is contending with another symptom of the risk of



Krivitsky Vladimir

spiritualizing the good news. Some were asserting that no resurrection for ourselves was to be expected, and we notice in other places in the New Testament this tendency to locate resurrection, Jesus' and ours, on an immaterial spiritual plane as a matter of the soul's destiny, rather than a recreative act of God that transforms and renews bodily, historical reality. Some "have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Timothy 2:18). Paul insists on the unbreakable link between the actual raising of Jesus on the third day and the ultimate consummation that the church's creed robustly calls "the resurrection of the body."

[FEBRUARY 24]

In the Family Business

Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40;
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

"BUT LOVE YOUR enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be the children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:35). This week we go right to the radical core of the ethics of the reign of God, the onset of God's future, learning from Jesus what it means to live under the authority of God, not the mores of the past. Unless we

drill down to this core, our understanding of what it means to be a child of God will be merely conventional and thin. In one sense we are all children of God already just by being human and being born with the stamp of the image and likeness of God in our personhood. But in another sense, we must become God's offspring to authenticate our right to this identity by demonstrating the family likeness and character in action.

In today's gospel passage we are urged to be children of God by working, so to speak, in the family business. In the society in which Jesus lived, most production was domestic, in family businesses where even little children were hard at work. It is still this way with many societies today, however much the industrial model is spreading. And so it would have been for Jesus, the little apprentice, alongside his sisters and brothers in Joseph's construction business. The Holy One's family business is reconciliation, risky solidarity, and love that is unconditional and generous—a business that is indifferent to profit or even breaking even. What a strange business model! But it is God's—and if we are to be part of the company in "God and Family: Distributors of Unconditional Love," then we must get down to business, and demonstrate our resemblance to our Creator. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

Look Both Ways. Pray. Repeat.

BY THE TIME you read this, I will either be recuperating from multiple contusions or hugging the outer walls of buildings as I walk from corner to corner, trying to avoid said contusions. Either outcome is apparently the price we pay for progress, although I'd be happy to let another loyal citizen experience that progress. (Why should I use up *my* sick leave?)

My anxieties of late have nothing to do with the usual political hypocrisy that stalks the streets of our nation's capital. I speak instead of thousands of rental bicycles and electric scooters that flit about like troublesome insects, albeit insects completely lacking in judgment and common sense. They are everywhere and, counterintuitively, can come out of nowhere. And they move with a speed matched only by the wobbliness of the inexperienced riders who thought it would be cool to "arrive in style." Or "in ambulance," depending on conditions.

To make matters worse, one

Even our sidewalks are not safe from the mayhem (sorry, "progress").

scooter company recalled thousands of its vehicles because some were at risk of spontaneously catching fire, an extremely dangerous occurrence that would both threaten the lives of riders and look totally cool as **FLAMES COME OUT OF YOUR SCOOTER!** But like I said, very dangerous and, after I do it once, it *must* be stopped.

Unfortunately, many riders of these vehicles prefer sidewalks as their roadways, since—and who can argue with their logic?—there are fewer cars to contend with on sidewalks.

As a result, we pedestrians must look both ways when we step outside, then cross our fingers and



clutch our rosaries until we reach the curb and enter the comparative safety of a busy street.

A street that will soon be fraught with its own new dangers.

Ford Motor Company recently announced that Washington, D.C., is a test city for its computer-driven vehicles, driverless cars that will enable D.C. residents to be among the first to enjoy the benefits of cutting-edge technology. But why not do it in, say, Cleveland?

I suggest this for a very rational, scientific reason: I don't walk around in Cleveland. I don't cross streets in Cleveland. And I'm not fleeing flaming scooters in Cleveland. I'm all for technological leaps, but not the kind that requires actual leaps to keep out of the way.

It all just makes me jittery.

FORTUNATELY, BEING jittery and looking around frantically in fear for your life are activities that comport well with the federal government's new guidelines on "movement." According to protocols from the Department of Health and Human Services, the benefits of exercise should no longer be defined as specific blocks of time for that purpose. Any movement—from standing up from your desk and walking up stairs to leaping into nearby bushes

to evade an oncoming driverless UPS truck—increases your heart rate and helps avoid chronic conditions from which many Americans suffer.

Not moving regularly, the report emphasized, is actually worse for your health than smoking. (Does that mean I can swim *and* vape and not experience cognitive decline? Does exercising frequently mean I'm not at risk from the secondhand smoke of flaming scooters?)

A central finding of the guidelines is that people sit too much, something I'm doing right now as I type this. Several people in this office got out in front of the problem by ordering standing desks, and I express my admiration of their prescience by making fun of them daily. Although maybe I'm just jealous. I'd get one, too, if I could figure out how to doze off from a standing position. (Falling always ruins a good nap.)

AS WE RISE from our sitting positions and move about in the outside world, maybe we should just embrace the new reality of vehicular traffic—both driverless and mindless—and enjoy its health-promoting benefits. Movement is good. Maybe movement motivated by fear is even better. (Does screaming burn calories?)

But pity the newcomers unprepared for our ever-changing modern world. Pilots over Ireland recently reported unexplained and rapidly moving bright lights, the latest proof of extraterrestrial life entering our atmosphere. But if aliens ever landed in Washington, D.C., they would be advised to stay off the streets and sidewalks. It's just not safe.

"People of Earth, hear us. We have come ..." [Splat.] ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Always My Sister's Keeper

Thank you for keeping Sojourners strong, determined, and bold for nearly five decades. Together, we have fought injustices to reduce the suffering of those on the margins, particularly women and girls.

There is no sugarcoating it: As Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court demonstrated, the painful experiences of women and girls are often pushed aside for the sake of power, discrediting their voices.

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